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AGROUND IN
THE SHALLOWS





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AGROUND IN THE SHALLOWS.

A *Nobel*,

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

C. RAY.

*Translator of "The Emperor and the Galilean," from the Norwegian
of H. Ibsen.*

Author of "Farm on the Fjord," "Catalan Bay," "Edelraute," etc.

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AGROUND IN THE SHALLOWS.

CHAPTER I.

“Through levity of heart and small care for our failings, we feel not the real sorrows of our souls.”

IN the drawing-room of a house, the windows of which looked over the Firth of Forth, where the eye of a stranger standing within wandered far over the fair hills of Fife, there was the sound of voices in high dispute.

“I call it thoroughly selfish and thoughtless of you, Donald. Do you think a boy who has no concern about any one but himself, will ever be of use to the world around him when he grows up to manhood? Is that the spirit which actuated your long line of noble hearted ancestors? I am ashamed of you.”

“I dare say my ancestors weren’t a bit.

different to other boys' ancestors ; they didn't happen to have such a strict account kept of them," grumbled Donald between his teeth. "I sometimes wish we knew nothing about ours, especially when they are always being dragged out of their graves to have the skeleton of their virtues dangled before my eyes, by way of example. I wish my father had been a navvy, and my grandfather a sweep ; then I should hear very little about them."

"You, a son of mine, dare to say that to me, your mother, Donald Ramsay ?" said the lady walking up to the boy, who, though staring straight in her face, nevertheless retreated involuntarily before his mother's commanding form and flashing eyes. "You wish your noble father, who ranks among the cleverest men in Scotland, and is the centre round which the genius of this great city gathers, was an uneducated navvy, and your gallant grandfather, who first fleshed his sword

at Waterloo, and was covered with glory in India, had been a sweep. Perhaps you have no greater reverence for your mother's family? Take that, and that"—she was about to administer a blow, still more telling than the first two, when Donald, who, between fear, rage, and mortification at not being able to return the blows upon his parent, did not calculate where he was going, stumbled in his backward retreat over a light table, and sent it, with all the nicknacks upon it, rolling upon the floor.

The smash brought both mother and son to their senses. A valuable Indian box lay with the lid parted in two, and a rare Bohemian glass vase had been shattered into fragments; while a small Venetian mirror shared the same fate.

Donald stood in mute dismay, expecting a fresh torrent of invective; but with the inconsistency common to people of ungoverned temper, Mrs. Ramsay remained

comparatively unmoved by this really serious loss ; the rest of her anger evaporated in the contemptuous words—

“Go to your room ; pity it isn’t a pigsty, with your low propensities. You are an awkward donkey. Don’t let me see your face again to-day. Your tea shall be sent to you. Take up your lessons to learn for to-morrow.”

As she swept out of the room, and closed the door violently behind her, Donald’s face for the next few moments bore anything but a pleasant expression.

“I am slanged like a thief for eating a few strawberries, which had no business to be left in a fellow’s way ; and when I do something that is of consequence, she says next to nothing. How can any one stand that ? I won’t much longer, and that’s a fact !”

He turned round with a sullen scowl, and caught sight of a figure standing in a doorway, on the opposite side of the room.

“What is the matter, Donald? Papa was in such a delicious sleep, when suddenly there was loud talking, then a smash, and a banging of doors, enough to wake the soundest sleeper; he woke up, as he does at any sudden noise, in a state of nervous tremour, that almost killed him. Oh! how can you be so thoughtless?”

“There it goes again, now for a jobation from you, Mother Grumble,” said Donald, saucily enough, but with a less surly tone. “It’s all mamma’s fault; you know what a temper she has.”

“I know what you are,” replied Edith, his sister, and senior by some six or seven years; “something you did annoyed her, no doubt. She ought not to be worried now papa is so ill. Where are the strawberries Aunt Isabel left for him?”

Donald was silent.

“Perhaps my mother took them away with her.”



snubbed as a fool, and know nothing, there is little encouragement either to seek or give sympathy."

"You have a hard time of it, I must confess," said his sister, kindly; "but you are anxious about our father—you think his state is very serious."

"I know it; Forrest told me the other day that the end might come any moment. We shall be in a frightful state of uncertainty—no profession fixed on for me, and I don't believe Donald will ever do much."

"That is a hard thing to say of a boy who is barely fifteen, Willie."

"Perhaps it is, but what has he accomplished hitherto, with all his cleverness? He could do anything if he chose, but he just idles his time away. I know everybody likes him, even old Maitland spoils him, just as mother does; all my hard grinding used to go for nothing against his lazy work. It's not pleasant to be stupid."

The speaker sat down with his hands hanging in a helpless, shiftless manner. He was very different in appearance to his younger brother; a thin figure, stooping, awkward shoulders, pale face, long straight hair, and dispirited eyes, formed anything but a pleasing picture, contrasted with Donald's fresh complexion, brown curling hair, open forehead, chiselled, manly features, and easy grace of manner. He was already as tall as Willie, strong made, and muscular; the type, in fact, of boyish health and good looks. At that moment he was striding upstairs again, three or four steps at a time.

"Look here, Edith, aren't they beauties? Give these to my father, and if mamma hasn't told him already, don't let him know I bolted the others like a pig. They are the very best Menzies had."

"What are they a pint?"

"Oh! never mind, you are so horribly

matter of fact; it's my affair. I wish, Willie, you'd lend me half-a-sovereign."

"Not I," replied his brother, "I know the colour of my money so long as it is in my own pocket; there is no chance of that if it once gets into yours."

"Stingy old niggard!" was the civil reply. "You'll lend it me, Edith? I promise to return it next week, honour bright."

"I will lend you enough to pay for the strawberries, Donald; what were they?"

"Eight shillings."

"So you ate up eight shillings this afternoon, in as many minutes! What do you want the other two for?"

"Oh! I only thought I might as well borrow a round sum when I was about it. Uncle Aleck comes to-morrow, and he always comes down with something handsome; you know that."

Edith drew out her purse.

"I depend on your keeping your word this

time, Donald. I cannot afford to be always giving you money; you never paid the last five I lent you. Do you remember?"

"By Jove! more I did. Well, give me the ten now, that will make fifteen; I shall remember that better than thirteen."

"If neither is likely to be paid back, I would rather keep my two shillings," said Edith, handing him the eight.

"Adieu, fair maiden; Lares and Penates, all adieu," said Donald, waving his hand with a dramatic air, "which means, in plain English, I am going to prison," he said to Willie; "will you tell Harry Carmichael I can't take a walk with him this evening, as I promised. I shall have to pay pretty dear for my mess of pottage—eight bob, and solitary confinement."

So saying, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and strode off, catching up his packet of school-books by the strap as he passed a table, where they were lying, on the

landing. Unfortunately, the last new novel from McWastime and Playall's lay there also, made too plainly manifest by the regulation string and ticket tied round the three volumes.

Donald, without a moment's hesitation, took possession of them, and the next four hours found him with his elbows on the table, his head resting on his hands, and his hair tumbling in thick billows over all. Greek inflections, and Virgil's Eclogues, were forgotten; a theme upon English literature in Queen Elizabeth's time, due on the following day, and to the preparation of which he intended devoting his enforced solitude, shared no better fate.

When Edith, and the old nurse Nannie, laden with eatables and tea, knocked at his door about seven o'clock, he stared at them with dilated pupils, and a mind too excited, for the moment, to realise their kind attentions.

“What the—? Oh! I forgot, thank you. Edith, this is a jolly book!”

“The very thing mamma has been rousing the house about. Strahan insisted he had carried it upstairs himself. Donald, you are enough to provoke a saint! Do you call this preparing your lessons for to-morrow? Mamma has invited Mr. and Mrs. Caryl Jones, and Miss Honey Vinegar to dine here this evening, and wanted to run through it before they came; there are great differences of opinion about it. She will be furious.”

“I am not sorry,” replied Donald; “why does she want to have people here when papa is so ill?”

“So you are anxious about him?” said Edith, with some surprise. “I thought no one was but Nannie and I.”

“I’m not altogether a brute, though I am a scatterbrained fellow in a general way, Edith;” he looked up with a glance that always made its way straight to his sister’s

heart. "I don't know what would become of the house, and us, and everything, if you and Nannie did not keep the whole machine together."

"Yer tea will be cowld, an' the chops spoiled gin ye no leave off claverin', Maisther Donald," said the servant, as she stood ready, but unwilling to leave the room until she had seen him begin; "not but ye're right about Miss Edith; she's nane o' yer feckless bodies, that never has their hids oot o' a beuk, except they're eatin'."

"You are jewels, the pair of you," said Donald, giving the old fat creature a pat on the back, and then trying to lift her cap off her head; but Nannie, aware of his tricks, had pinned it on too firmly.

"Just see after yer lessons, there's a braw laddie," was Nannie's rejoinder; "ye maun take that novel awa', Miss Edith, or there'll be no chance o't the night."

Donald looked with regretful eyes at the book, as Edith obeyed.

“Let me finish the last two chapters, Edith; I’ll do it in half-an-hour. It’s horrid work, feeding by oneself.”

“This is your way of being punished,” answered the sister, putting both arms on his shoulders, and laying her cheek against his.

While the two read those last chapters together, let us look a little nearer into the family, of which they form a part.

CHAPTER II.

“There our actors—were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air.”

LORD RAMSAY, whose shrunken form seemed scarcely to retain the size and stature of a man as he lay on his dying bed, began life with all the advantages that good birth and fine means could bestow. His father served with distinction in the earlier Indian campaigns, where he became a general officer; and it was matter of regret to his contemporaries, and of open disapprobation to those above him in command, when he relinquished the honourable career open before him, sold out, and married the beautiful and only daughter of James Seton, one of the leading advocates of the day in Edinburgh.

The descendant of a hundred Setons was not inclined to leave her native city, where all her youthful triumphs had been consummated, and where she consented to give her

hand to the only man who had succeeded in gaining her affections ; she insisted, for no good reason she could actually adduce to herself or others, that General Ramsay should sell out and retire.

The consequence of enforced idleness soon became apparent. His club, whist, dinners, sherry and old port, made an old man before his time of as fine an officer as ever commanded a regiment.

General Ramsay reached the age of fifty-seven, when apoplexy ended a course of self-indulgence, which cut off thirteen years of the shortest span allowed by the Psalmist as the length of human life. One son, the issue of this marriage, took no liking to a military life. George Ramsay was emphatically a clever boy. He soon made his mark among the first set at the High School. At the University, he distinguished himself in no less a degree. The most promising speaker in debating clubs, he early acquired an ease

of utterance and grace of manner, which allowed him to bring out his knowledge to advantage, and helped him essentially in the career he adopted—that of the Scottish bar. His mother's relations were far more to his taste than the roystering companions who gathered round his father. It was, therefore, no matter of wonder when his engagement to his cousin, Effie Seton, put an end to the surmises which the constant preference he displayed for her on all occasions through many successive seasons had aroused.

Effie was a very uncommon girl, the eldest of two daughters. Her father, a writer to the Signet, was twin brother of an advocate, who succeeded to his father's name and practice, if he did not quite equal Mr. James Seton in talent.

Tom Seton, as a writer, profited largely by his brother Aleck's influence, and was reputed a rich man before he married an heiress. Tradition assigned Glasgow as the

birthplace of his handsome, but not very refined spouse; there were whisperings in the select upper circle, to which the Ramsay's and Seton's belonged, that manufacturers of some mysterious articles, lurked in the roll of Mrs. Tom Seton's short pedigree.

Two brothers, officers, however, who had served with distinction in foreign parts, came home rich and married well, served to redeem the blot a little, though a dark suspicion floated still over the minds of the better-born of their acquaintances that the yacht, the grand house on the Clyde, and the princely expenditure in general of the eldest brother, had some occult connection with *Turkey Red*.

The pure taste of the modern Athenians, suffered at times from the less-dignified manner and slight Glasgow twang of the handsome hostess of the mansion in Moray Place. Mr. Tom Seton's style of living was quite consonant with his reputation of being

rich. The noble drawing-rooms of the stately residence became the resort of all the best society of the place; literary men, learned professors, intelligent young officers, aspiring to fill future posts of honour, and others, aiming at nothing beyond the possibility of getting rid of their useless, graceless years as speedily as possible, all gladly resorted to the balls, and dinner parties, private theatricals, concerts and the like, which kept the house of the well-to-do lawyer in high repute. In addition to his hospitality, Mr. Tom Seton's two daughters were both beauties, very different, equally attractive; and his brother, the advocate, who had married and lost his wife early, had no children, neither had he yet grown tired of widowhood.

Among all the guests, none was more welcome than their cousin George Ramsay. He had been named after a Scotch peer, who had sighed for years in vain at his mother's feet with the persevering obstinacy of a weak,

sickly temperament; he had never married, it was said, out of regard for his early *penchant*, and had left a handsome legacy to her only child, his godson, at his death. Had it been in his power, he would probably have given more, but the estate and title passed to a distant relative.

It was with Effie George played the part of lover in the dramas they acted; he was the Hamlet to her Ophelia, the Orlando to her Rosalind, and at last the Benedick to her Beatrice in the Shakespearian evenings, which were one of the most popular amusements during the winter, when his increasing popularity as an advocate, his godfather's bequest, and his own unconquerable attachment to his cousin, made him feel there was no longer any reason why he should defer asking for the hand, he was already sure of her willingness to give.

Isabel, the youngest girl, had become engaged to Lord Carshalton, a man of old

family but impoverished means, and the two sisters were married on the same day, according to the customs and rites of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

The rest of Lord Ramsay's career is soon told. An ardent Liberal, a staunch supporter of the national religion, a Scotsman of the Scots, a writer for the Whig reviews, an enthusiast for progress in education, science, arts, agriculture, and law, there was no reason why George Ramsay should not reach the highest honours of his profession, and he did.

As a law-lord, he enjoyed all the respect his uprightness and eminent legal knowledge deserved. Mrs. Ramsay reigned for years the leader of society in the house where she was born. Her father and mother left it, as it stood, for the young couple, and retired to a smaller one; yet, in the face of all this transcendent prosperity, long before they were due, grey threads mingled with the

brown in George Ramsay's hair ; deep lines of care furrowed his cheeks and forehead, and although, at his father's death, an increase of income came to meet the growing strain on his finances, there were not a few who felt certain that the successful lawyer, the brilliant man of the world, had tested its hollowness, and found its fair-seeming fruit turn to ashes in his mouth.

"I do not think I will come down to dinner, mamma," Edith said, as she met her mother arrayed in evening dress of silk and jewels, on her way to the drawing-room to receive her 'guests ; "papa does not seem as if he wishes me to leave him. Here is the book." She held out the novel Donald had purloined.

"McWastime has sent it at last. I really must go and subscribe at McMead's as well ; I cannot get the books when I want them. I wish Donald had not chosen to go and behave ill, so ill, that I really could not pass

it over. I should have liked him to meet the Caryl Jones' ; it will be tiresome, also, your being away, I think you might have come down just for dinner, Edith, Nannie can watch by your father."

"I cannot appear to-night, mamma, papa seemed pleased when I proposed to stay with him."

"Oh, very well, you never seem to care about intelligent people, at least, those whom I think intellectual. Miss Honey Vinegar is a person it would be particularly advantageous for you to see a great deal of."

Mrs. Ramsay passed on, and Edith, seated by her father's bedside, heard the bustle of guests arriving. It was a small, select party, one of the little dinners for which Lord Ramsay had been celebrated, but not composed on this occasion of guests he would have invited. He had never believed in the "twenty creditors" system, and his guests seldom sat down more than ten, or twelve, in

number, inclusive of the members of the household present. The boys seldom appeared, Willie, because he did not feel at home in his father's and mother's presence, and Donald, because the hour interfered with his studies or his pleasures. This evening the guests were only six, Mr. and Mrs. Caryll Jones, Miss Honey Vinegar, the authoress of an astute paper, carefully culled from other authors on metaphysics, published in a local magazine, struggling in vain to emerge into eminence, a lesser dignitary of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, and a rising young barrister, whose satisfaction was a good deal dashed by Edith's non-appearance, far more than by the maturer age of all the other members of the party. It was in vain Miss Honey Vinegar approached him with one of her blandest smiles; it was the first time she had met him, and had an opportunity of speaking.


“I hear you are an enthusiast in music,

Mr. Dewar, I must engage you at once to join our 'Euterpian Choral Union;' we are practising Brahm's 'Requiem,' Mendelssohn's 'Walpurgis Nacht,' and a scene from Gluck's 'Iphigenia.' For the concert I am to play Bach's 'Chromatic Fantasia,' Litz's 'March Hongroise' and Chopin's 'Polonaise in A flat.'"

The young barrister looked at her in blank dismay, some of the pieces she mentioned he had not even heard of.

"I am sorry to say I am very much out of practice," he answered, with an absent glance towards the door, where he every moment expected Edith to appear; "I was not in musical society in London, and lived only two years in Germany long ago."

"Ah, then, you heard Wagner," persisted Miss Honey Vinegar, who had tortured one of Beethoven's themes into a series of variations so obtruse, that the theme got lost entirely, even the finest ear being incapable of



following its devious track ; when it scrambled back, about the end of the eighteenth variation, it was in such a very infirm and dilapidated condition, its best friends couldn't be certain of its identity, but it established her position as a person of musical genius, and gave her a right to talk on the subject. "What do you think of his theory?" she asked, "do you consider it a false or a true one?"

"I am afraid I have never considered the matter," replied Mr. Dewar, "I remember thinking the 'Meistersänger' noisy and monotonous."

"Ah! ha! one more *Philister*," said Mr. Caryll Jones, rubbing his hands, "what do you say to that, Miss Honey Vinegar?"

"That the Scotch are the only people in Great Britain who really appreciate the Grand Master," she replied; "you are neither of you really Scotch; am I mistaken, Mr. Dewar?"

"No," said the barrister, with a look of slight embarrassment.

"He has been the first man to assign the *libretto* its real position, and make poetry the handmaid, not the slave, of music," said Miss Honey, launched on one of her favourite topics. "He is a poet, as well as a composer; and future generations will only add fresh chaplets to the laurels he has already gathered."

"Still, I think his operas are not performed here, are they?" asked Mr. Dewar.

"No," said the lady, in a decidedly snappish tone, "but they will be, he is already more cultivated by private performers with us than in London."

The entrance of Strahan to announce dinner saved Montague Dewar from any further examination in his musical attainments. He found the task of leading his interlocutor down to dinner less dangerous work than conversation. He had Mrs.

Caryll Jones opposite, by whose side sat the Church dignitary, while Mr. Caryll Jones took the bottom of the table.

“You will have warm work in the general assembly this year,” began Dr. Jacobs, when the soup had been served; “there are some terribly black sheep in the Presbyterian fold who have to be admonished pretty severely.”

“Not more than will trouble your community,” replied Mrs. Ramsay. “I smell heresy in that ‘tabernacle of Jacob,’ which faces the ‘gates of Zion’ over the way; it is a growing thorn in your sides; we shall have the spectacle of schism, even in the small body of the elect, who rally round the Episcopal standard as deep as those which threaten disruption to England’s Church.”

“I had a dear old aunt living in Clifton, some years ago,” replied Dr. Jacobs, with a merry twinkle in his eye, “who when she was asked whether she belonged to the High Church, or the Low, answered in sublime

ignorance of parties, ‘oh ! the high ; I go to the church on the hill.’ ”

Miss Honey Vinegar had by this time tried her new acquaintance on several subjects in succession, especially on art furniture, for which she had designed a series of drawings, which would have immortalised her, had the public been as awake to the matter as it is now ; but society was not educated up to the duty of exchanging the jovial slanting backs of their broad seated leather and Utrecht velvet chairs, for the straight lines, and defective sitting accommodation, which recall the furniture of our remote ancestors. She found Mr. Dewar thought slightly of the efforts then beginning to be set on foot by women, to obtain degrees medical, or otherwise, and their due share of plums, in the privileges of married life ; he seemed to think the attempt of attaining a universal acceptance of the continental pronunciation of vowels, in Latin, a thing of no moment ;

was a heretic on the subject of the blamelessness of Mary Stuart's moral character, the innocence of Henry VIIIth's tendency to irritability, and changeableness, in the matter of wives, of Oliver Cromwell's motives, and the misdoings of a few more old fashioned sinners; he was unsympathetic on every subject. She turned in despair to Mrs. Caryll Jones, and was soon in hot dispute with her and her husband, over some abstruse passages in the early Greek plays. Montague Dewar gave a sigh of relief.

"Is your daughter, Miss Ramsay, from home? or is she not well?" he asked of the hostess, at last, when he feared she would not be visible even in the drawing-room.

"Oh! thank you, she is quite well; but you know Lord Ramsay is in a very unsatisfactory state of health. I really fear we must induce him to go abroad, but—"

At that moment, a hurried footstep was heard coming downstairs, crossing the hall,

and leaving the front door, hurry past the dining-room windows. Strahan entered with a white, frightened face.

"Miss Edith wished me to tell you, madam, my lord is worse; she has sent for the doctor; and begs you to come up at once."

Mrs. Ramsay read in his countenance that his message brooked no delay.

"Will you excuse me?" she said to her guests, "pray continue your dinner. Strahan, see that the next course is served?"

"I think the ladies and gentlemen had better go home," replied Strahan, with candour. By this time Montague Dewar was already in the hall, where a sight of Donald's white face, ushering in Dr. Forrest, confirmed his fears.

"For God's sake let us go," he whispered to Mr. Caryll Jones, as Mrs. Ramsay followed the physician upstairs.

"It is extraordinary Mrs. Ramsay's asking

us here at all," muttered Miss Honey Vinegar. "Her husband has been at death's door the last four months, and she has seldom passed an evening alone."

Hurriedly the visitors put on coats and mufflers, and without calling for a cab, they left the smitten household to deal with the uninvited guest, who had supplanted them in their hostess's attentions. Mr. Dewar would not take Miss Honey's broad hints to see her home, but committed her to Dr. Jacobs's care, and wandered for an hour up and down near the house.

CHAPTER III.

" Oh, but they say the tongues of dying men
Enforce attention like deep harmony ;
Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain,
For they breathe true, that breathe their words in pain."

WHEN Edith withdrew the curtain from before her father's face, as soon as the guests were settled in the dining-room, she met his eye fixed on hers, with an expression that denoted intense, almost feverish, anxiety. He clasped her hands in both his, and then turning to Nannie, said, "go." Smoothing the coverlid, as if to show her wish to serve them, the faithful creature cast a loving look on the two people she had tended for years, and went; but looked back once more at the door, to say to Edith, "I'll be near, gin ye want me, dearie." Her loving eyes were full of tears; she employed the old words of endearment, so often used in childhood, as if to say, "you have no more faithful friend

than old Nannie," and then gently but carefully closed the door behind her.

Lord Ramsay drew his daughter's face down to his, and kissed it.

"Bless you, my own darling, my greatest comfort next to—my God. The time is short, there is something I must tell you. Edith, can you bear a trial that may last for years?"

"I can bear anything, father, but the agony of parting from you." She dropped on her knees beside the bed, and wept bitterly for a few moments, beyond control.

Lord Ramsay put his lips to the waves of chestnut hair, which he always loved to smooth, and fondle, and let her sorrow have its way for awhile, then he whispered—

"Stop, darling, for my sake."

The sobs grew quieter at once.

"Edith, you have been accustomed to luxury, and the free use of money; will it grieve you to hear your father is not a rich

man ; and that as soon as I am gone, you must move to a smaller house, keep fewer servants, and live very differently ? ”

“ I shall not feel it, papa, but mamma—”

“ Ay, it will be a sore trial to her ; and to you, through your mother. Child ! Why had I not the courage to tell her the truth long ago. I speculated in foreign bonds—they failed—her extravagance did the rest ; my child, you are all comparative beggars, unless your grandfather, and Uncle Aleck help you.”

“ But they will. Uncle Aleck is always kind, and he has no children ; do not let this thought fret you, father, we shall be taken care of.”

“ Ah ! but the bread of dependence is hard to eat, Edith ; every one finds it so sooner or later.”

“ I need not eat it, papa,” she said, raising her head, “ I could teach, give lessons in music and drawing, do many things.”

“Child, child, you do not know what that would entail in this cruel world; your mother’s pride would never submit to that; she would sooner see you in your grave.”

A sudden spasm of pain contracted his brow, and Edith rose frightened, but he made a movement to detain her; in a few moments it passed away, and he asked for a dose of medicine.

“I think mamma might be more reasonable, under the pressure of real trouble,” Edith said, when Lord Ramsay again lay back, his strength renewed for a little while.

“Your mother will never be reasonable,” he said, “she will never now be able to control her temper, it is disease; she will ruin Donald, and break your heart, as she has done mine.”

With a groan that seemed to come from the deep well of anguish in his soul, he once more clasped Edith’s hands with convulsive energy.

“Father ! precious, dear father,” exclaimed Edith, “are you not hard upon our mother ?”

“No, *no*,” he said, with emphasis ; “you do not know what I have suffered with her ; what you will have to suffer ; what she must come to at last !”

“What do you mean ?” asked Edith, as the colour left her cheeks, and she sat trembling, with a fearful foreboding of some dreadful secret creeping over her, like an icy breath of cold air. “Mamma is very trying, but—”

“Edith, only Nannie knows besides me ; the world sees only the charming, accomplished woman. I have kept my sorrow well hidden, but the keeping it has helped to kill me ; yet once I worshipped the ground she trod on—I thought her an angel—people may think her one now—only her household. We who suffer, know how soon the angel semblance is let fall, where the ——’s nature *begins*.”

Edith lost the missing word, and bent down; Lord Ramsay's breath seemed coming shorter and fainter.

“Your mother is a —”

This time the poor girl's ears, sharpened to unnatural quickness by the tension of her nerves, caught the whisper but too distinctly. She sprang up, as if stung by a serpent. When she bent over her father once more, the words—“He is a just God, and a Saviour;” “the sorrows of my heart are enlarged;” “into Thy hands I commend my spirit”—spoken at long intervals, broken, so that Edith's practised ear could alone guess their meaning and connection, told in what frame of mind the man of intellectual attainment, of worldly experience, and of social position, was preparing to meet his Maker.

Edith called Nannie, who instantly dispatched Donald for the doctor, Strahan to warn Mrs. Ramsay, and afterwards find Willie. The end was drawing on fast. There was no thought of fetching a minister.

The Presbyterian church has no last rites to administer, strong in their doctrinal purity; its disciples neither expect nor receive—however naturally some may desire it—the consolation of sacramental ministration; they savour of popery, and episcopacy, and grovelling superstition.

Only once, at midnight, the dying father rallied for a few minutes, it was to put his hand on Donald's head, as he lay sobbing bitterly beside the pillows, and say, in slow, distinct accents—

“Resist the *first* sin, my son—pray for strength against the *first* false step.”

Mrs. Ramsay sat at the bottom of the bed like one paralysed; her eyes fixed on a pattern in the counterpane, mute, trembling, at last she rose, and held one of her husband's hands, till the death struggle parted, at least for time, what God had joined together twenty-one years before. The thoughts that passed through her brain,

as she sat so long silent, and still, in her noble statuesque beauty, the fine outline of face and bust still apparent, thick coils of wavy hair like Edith's, but darker, plaited like a coronet about her head—no one ever knew. When the last was over, she kissed the cold forehead, so late the home of lofty thought, and resolute purpose; looked long and fixedly at the altered face, now calm and placid, under the releasing hand of death. A convulsive shudder seemed to shake her whole frame, and she returned to the room occupied by her during Lord Ramsay's illness. Nannie followed her for a few minutes, and then returned to send Edith and the boys away. Her tender hands rendered the last offices to her beloved master, as they had done to his father and mother; she was true to her post beside George Ramsay, from his cradle to his grave.

“Mistress Ramsay wishes naeboddy to gang nigh the room but me,” was Nannie's daily

order to the rest of the domestics, until the day appointed for the funeral. "Ye winna try to see her, dearie," was the supplication addressed to Edith, who, sure of her mother's being well cared for, had no wish to break in upon her solitude.

While the world outside pictured mother and daughter helping each other through their common trial, each was bearing their load of sorrow apart, and after their individual and peculiar fashion.

Edith went about the house, giving orders concerning domestic matters, as she had done for two years past, since her return from a boarding school at Cheltenham, whither she had been sent by Dr. Forrest's advice, on account of an early delicacy of chest. This she had completely outgrown, and her *physique* was as perfectly healthy as a woman's should be, enhancing the natural grace of *contour* and manner. Mrs. Ramsay had made no objection to her relieving her

of the small share of household management she had ever undertaken, with the exception of ordering dinner, this she retained. With Nannie's help for the first few weeks, and her advice ever at hand, later Edith became *au fait* in her duties, and soon introduced various measures of economy, punctuality, and order, which greatly delighted her father. Lord Ramsay never tired of watching this, his favourite child, with silent content. Alas! that so little time was allowed him for an enjoyment so legitimate.

Mrs. Ramsay used her additional freedom for more extensive visiting, especially with literary people, among whom her grandfather's and husband's name assured her a certain pre-eminence. Almost every month, she delivered, opposed, or seconded, some subject, debated in the sessions of feminine talent, denominated "The Ladies' Literary, Scientific, Philosophical, and Metaphysical

Association, for the advancement of general and particular knowledge in the City of Modern Athens," called by outsiders "The Parliament of the Modern Feminine Athenians," which assembled at the houses of the more influential members; and here it was that her friendship with Miss Honey Vinegar had its birth and subsequent development. Close adherence to the forms of masculine debate, rather than to its real character, was apparent in this assembly; it gratified Mrs. Ramsay by allowing scope for her love of dictation and domination. Edith went once, and only once.

"It was rather amusing, papa," she said, on the same evening, when sitting on a low stool at his feet, as was her wont, after Mrs. Ramsay had retired from the dining-room; "only some of them used such hard, long words, I wanted a dictionary; and it seemed to come straight out of books; the ideas sounded borrowed, and when the debate

came on, after all the papers were read—I forget how many there were—the ladies very soon began all to talk at once, or to each other, instead of listening to one speech, and speaking to it. It was such a noise at last, mamma had to rap quite loud to bring them to order.”

The judge laughed.


“You don’t mean to become a female orator, then, Edith?”

“No, papa, so long as I have you to choose my books for me, and show me all I have to learn, before I can presume to teach others. I could but think, when Miss Honey Vinegar was speaking of the value of systematic reading, in contrast to omnivorous devouring of lending library books, how much I owed to your insisting on that point as soon as I came home. I thought her speech the most sensible one of the sitting, though her ungainly, tall figure, and rough, sharp voice, did not enhance the pleasure of listening to

it. I wonder whether they have such meetings elsewhere? or whether our women are cleverer than others?"

"At any rate, they are quite convinced of the fact themselves; and as it is a harmless delusion, there is no end served in undeceiving them," replied Lord Ramsay; "we have an excellent opinion of ourselves, both men and women, but it helps us on in the world, and I venture to say there is scarcely a woman amongst them who does not strive in some way to be of real use in the world. If so, we can forgive the absence of the fine tact, and the amenity of manner, which are, after all, poor substitutes for intrinsic worth, though they may be valuable additions to it."

The result of Edith's close association with her father, and the interest taken by him in the promotion of her taste for reading, was, that she became more and more the depository of his sympathies and aspirations, and



able to appreciate the conversation between him and his chosen friends, without being puffed up with mere technical terms and scientific phraseology.

Consequently, Edith Ramsay was declared by the men of highest culture in Edinburgh, as well as by the strangers whose society she had ample means of enjoying, the most intelligent and companionable girl, superior to any in that city, and surpassed by few in larger capitals.

Her gentle words and gracious manner, smoothed over many a wound given by her mother's sharp gift of *repartee*, and biting sarcasm. How is it parent and child so often furnish the most striking contrasts? Unwisely, it may be scarcely nurtured at all, by the one, the other shows a fair example of womanly wisdom ; while a second child, cherished like some delicate flower, sheltered from every noxious influence, trained for the best in word, and by example, encouraged by

promises and rewards to walk in the path of well-doing, develops into an embodiment of selfishness, and cruel indifference to the needs and feelings of others. Happy is it if she do not become something worse.

Much a picture were enough to make the disembodied spirits of her father and mother, could they see her, turn into timely instruments of God's chastisement, while remaining the ministering spirits we fondly imagine them to be.


To the boys, the week of enforced quietness, solitude and sorrow, brought also its totally different impression. Donald, much as he loved his father, could scarcely conceal his dismay at the cutting off of outward excitement, and his customary distractions and society. Edith had to step him more than once from committing a breach of the decorum imposed by outward opinion at such a season. Willie, the change made only more reserved and self-absorbed: he passed

hours in his bedroom, no one knew how composed, as he always shrank from and protested against its invasion, even by his mother and Edith. If they went in during his absence, they found nearly every drawer locked.

CHAPTER IV.

"Fie, fie! unkind that threatening, unkind brow,
And dart not scornful glances from those eyes,—
It blots thy beauty, as frost does the meads,
And in no sense is meet or amiable."

THE will was to be read after Lord Ramsay's funeral. Who that has had a long life does not know the trial of such a time, or can ever forget it? Edith and the two boys were present; Mrs. Ramsay sat in her handsome widow's weeds beside the drawing-room fire, seen by her family for the first time since her husband's death. The executors were her uncle, Mr. Aleck Seton, and her father. They had spared every reference to her during the week beyond the most necessary and indispensable questions, which Nannie had given, and brought replies to them. This out of deference to her vehement entreaty, or, perhaps, really imperative command, to be left alone.



Mrs. Ramsay had never yielded obedience to any will but her own, and her father did not expect her to begin now. These fits of retirement occurred from time to time, and were not new to him. Uncle Aleck grumbled, but had to submit.

“Ye maun e’en let her gang her ain gate,” was Nannie’s advice to both of them; “ye’ll no win the faster for trying to mak her gang yours; an’ ye’ll lose time an’ temper a’ thegither. She’s unco’ hard i’ the mou’, like my daddy’s auld cuddie.”

It was not a complimentary comparison for the stately lady of the mansion, but plain truths have sometimes to be told by plain people, even in royal palaces. Both executors felt it was not a pleasant task that lay before them—that of to-morrow. The state of affairs revealed by the writer to the Signet, whom Lord Ramsay had employed, filled both with concern and astonishment. Mr. Tom Seton had harboured doubts on the state of

his son-in-law's affairs for some time ; but Lord Ramsay's reticence precluded questions. He was not a man to suffer interference in his private concerns.

To Uncle Aleck it was an unfeigned surprise. Neither hesitated for a moment as to what was to be done. Scotch people cling loyally to their own kith and kin, as a rule ; and, by a little timely aid, often tide over a difficulty, and keep a family trouble from the knowledge of a hard-judging world, when the English would, perhaps, disdain all responsibility to help.

Each at once agreed what was the allowance he could afford to give under the circumstances, necessitous and unexpected. When, therefore, after the reading of the will, the writer to the Signet explained that the investments enumerated, practically amounted to nothing, and the small family estate was deeply mortgaged, Mrs. Ramsay's face began to show signs of a gathering storm. Her father said awkwardly—

“That was an unfortunate speculation of my poor son-in-law’s; it is strange how such clever men err in judgment about business matters.”

“Who dares to say my noble husband ever erred?” was Mrs. Ramsay’s rejoinder.

“Well, Effie, we are all apt to make mistakes, the very wisest of us; but the unhappy side of this question is, that you have nothing to live upon.”

“Then we must go to the workhouse,” replied his daughter; “but I do not believe it.”

“I except, of course, the two hundred a year which I have hitherto given you, and which I must now double.”

“Thank you,” said his daughter, curtly. “I little expected to be a beggar at my father’s door at forty-five; three children and myself living on four hundred a year, coming entirely from you, is not unlike it.”

“It does not seem much, truly, after the

fine income George enjoyed ; but—you see, he saved nothing.”

“I should think not ; petty economy and penny hoarding were not in his way. He had a soul above scraping for filthy lucre.”

“Still, a little thought for the future is not unbecoming in the finest characters,” put in Uncle Aleck.

“How could he live for less, in his position ?” demanded the widow, while an angry spot was forming on either cheek, and the ample strings of her white muslin cap trembled ominously. “Could a man of Lord Ramsay’s stamp hide his light under a bushel ? or refuse to take his rightful place among men ? His career was carved out for him by his talent, and his natural superiority to his surroundings. I am willing to be a beggar, but not to rest quietly and have a slur cast upon a man, whose character only a few could appreciate, much less imitate.”

“My dear Effie—” began Mr. Tom Seton.

“No, father, not one word against my husband.”

“If he had only told you the state of his affairs, you might at least—”

“How could that have helped?”

“You might at least have reduced your household expenditure.”


“And have heard him pitied as a poor man, pointed at as a ruined speculator; have seen him deprived of the society he adorned, refuse the honours he became so well! No, father, it is better as it is; he died as he lived, a man of parts and position, and if those whose relationship naturally demands that they take care his widow and children should not come to want, refuse to do so, then let the world cry shame upon them; the matter is plain enough, plain as the features on your faces.”

“I have already told you my intentions,” said her father, with restrained anger, “you seem to forget that.”

“Indeed, I do not. I picture vividly to my mind’s eye, the widow of Lord Ramsay, in a third story flat, in London street, or a small villa on the Corstorphine road, with a garden six feet by eight, and a paling in front. I am resigned to the fate. I dare say six or seven of my kind friends will be able to find their way to it, by the help of a hackney coachman. Edith had better set up a school, advertise for three or four eligible pupils, directly.”

“I am perfectly ready and willing to do so, mamma ; there is no disgrace where there is no ill-doing ; working for one’s bread is neither a crime nor a reproach, even for the descendant of a hundred Setons, if need require it.”

“The necessity for further openings for the independent working of women, is a subject often mooted now. I read a paper upon it myself last month, little thinking how soon a practical illustration of its use would be given in my own person.”



"Only it happens to be your daughter's," mildly suggested Uncle Aleck.

"Whether in my own or my daughter's, it apparently matters little to you," said Mrs. Ramsay, almost fiercely.

"I am not bound to spend my income on any object except myself, unless I choose," replied Uncle Aleck.

"Who said you were?" retorted Mrs. Ramsay, "I have never asked for a farthing of your money, as far as I can remember."

"Nor will you get any of it yourself, now," replied Uncle Aleck, very red in the face, and pacing up and down the farther side of the room, in extreme irritation. Lady Carshalton had always been a much greater favourite with him than Mrs. Ramsay. "I will do my best to help your boys, I will take the entire charge of the expenses necessary to finish Donald's education on my own hands; as for you, Edith," he said, his tone changing at once, "*there* is enough to save


you from going governessing for some years at least," he placed a packet in her hands, and added with emphasis, "it is for your special use and benefit, I can depend on your spending it wisely ; and when it is finished, come to me for more."

Involuntarily Mrs. Ramsay's eyes followed the roll of bank notes, and Donald's glittered ; he had become so accustomed to have recourse to Edith's purse, that the present, whatever might be the amount, seemed half his already. Willie remained absorbed, and took little notice.

"Indeed, Uncle Aleck, you must not give me all this ; I should like to earn it," Edith said, giving it all back.

The kindly, hot tempered, impulsive, old man put his hands upon her shoulders, and looked tenderly at her out of his clear blue eyes.

"You will want it, my child ; you do not know yet, what a narrowed income is. It



goes to my heart, that you must. It is far harder, than for those who have never had an ample one."

"We have been looking about for a house suitable for you, Effie," began Mr. Tom Seton again, aware this would be a sorer subject even than the want of money.

"Could we not go elsewhere, to some country place?" replied Mrs. Ramsay, "where we should not be known, and not have to keep up an appearance?"

"The boys must have a home; Donald at least, will be entering the University, and I am sure you would never bear the monotony of country life."

"You have yet to learn what I can bear," replied his daughter, "be so good as not to gauge my abilities in this way, before my children. You treat me as if I were a spoiled child myself."

"We, that is your uncle and I, have seen several, which you had better look at, and as


soon as you are able to decide on one, it must be taken ; the lease of this house runs out in five years ; till then you are allowed to sublet, and the difference of rent will add somewhat to your income."

"And pray where are these eligible residences ?"

"I have a list," said Mr. Seton, passing it over to her.

Mrs. Ramsay scanned it, a bitter smile curled her lips.

"Drummond Place, down among the Leith tradesmen ; we can improve our Scotch accent there, Edith ; and the boys will find suitable companions for their altered circumstances. Melville Street, that is a shade higher in the scale, and if we cannot make two ends meet, we can let the drawing-room, and have Nannie to keep the lodgers in order ; nearer the Haymarket, Glasgow swells live there, who come for their children's education, and make frantic efforts to join in



the best society. We should be at a premium among them, Edith ; you might make a money match, with some shipbuilder on the Clyde, and have a palace in the Trossachs, and a yacht in the Hebrides ; the blood in your veins has some right to tend that way ; not even the Setons, have kept it pure in these days of money getting, and money marrying."

This allusion to her own mother, was too much for Mr. Tom Seton, said in the presence of a comparative stranger.

"I do not expect you to like your altered circumstances, or to make the best of them," he said, more sternly than he had ever before spoken to his daughter in her whole life, "but I have a right to common gratitude, and common civility ; you must make your choice before term time, which will be here in six weeks. It will be best to let this house furnished ; less magnificent tables and chairs, will perhaps bring you to your senses,

as soon as anything; still, do as you like about it."

"Not one article will I part with," said Mrs. Ramsay, haughtily; "I will at least preserve the things consecrated by my husband's presence, and use, and the memory of my married life. The few works of art he chose, will hide the poverty of our future dwelling, and its vulgar proportions. Have you finished insulting me? Am I free to go, and digest all this pleasing information?"

"Which no doubt you think it has been pleasing to us to communicate," said her father, thoroughly exasperated; "but that respect for your bereavement, restrains me from saying all I think, you might have heard some home truths."

"There will be plenty of time for those later," retorted Mrs. Ramsay, and without one word of thanks to the men who were thus kindly managing for her, smoothing her path,

and sacrificing much to her comfort, she swept out of the room.

“Thank heaven it was no worse,” said Uncle Aleck, feeling restlessly about for his handkerchief, and blowing his nose till he was red in the face. Then he turned to the boys.

“Now lads, you must put your shoulders to the wheel ; if I pay, I expect you to work, it is only a fair bargain. What do you wish to be, Willie ?”

Willie hung his head, he did not cut a good figure, standing with his nerveless looking hands playing with his waistcoat buttons, and his dull eye wandering from one to the other.

“I don’t know, uncle,” he replied, after Mr. Alexander Seton had repeated the question ; “an advocate, perhaps.”

“Heaven help you, my poor lad !” exclaimed his uncle, as he mentally drew a picture of Willie among the wags and wits of the Parliament House ; a butt for their

satire, and the object of endless practical jokes; "can't you think of something more suitable? If you were an Englishman, and an Episcopalian, we could put you into Holy Orders; but the Presbyterians, I'm afraid, wouldn't have you; you'd be a probationer all your life time."

"I will be a banker's clerk, or in a merchant's office; I am ready to do whatever you think best, uncle."

There was something touching in his humble look, and earnest words;—had his mother been present, Willie would not have ventured to say so much; a scathing sarcasm almost always greeted every sentiment he uttered. The handsome mother was irritated by her uncouth offspring.

"Very well, my boy; I will think about something for you. I am sure you will try to do your best, wherever your lot may be thrown."

The words were intended to be kind, but

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they conveyed so plainly the speaker's conviction, "bad will be your best," that Willie felt it. Yet he was thankful to hear nothing sharp, and retired to the further window, where he stood dreamingly looking over the view, so rare for a city dwelling. The Dean Bridge threw its noble arch over the rift, where the water of Leith carried its burthen of pollution to the sea, its craggy banks forming a splendid foreground. Corstorphine, and the swelling woods of Cramond, ruddy in the glow of the setting sun, but as yet dark, and bereft of foliage, a background to the stately hospital. Far away, thanks to a kindly westerly wind, and the rain which had fallen heavily in the night, the distant mountains to the left rose faint, but nobly outlined in the misty orange tinted atmosphere of sunset ; while the Forth gleamed blue and clear under a space of deep azure sky at the foot of the Fife hills, on whose tops the fleecy clouds were resting,

alternations of light and shadow, bringing out a spot here and there in vivid green. The sweep of undulating country in front was not yet clothed in its mantle of fresh springing grass and corn ; yet it possessed its share of grace and beauty. Willie loved the prospect ; it had often spoken words of comfort to him, in a language those understand who lead a solitary unloving life. Even his otherwise just and kind father had never been drawn to the queer, silent boy. Edith, always gentle, felt she did not understand him, his mother was always a terror to him ; Donald contemptuous, Nannie, faithful in fulfilling a servant's duties towards his buttons and socks, but not much comfort besides, except when he was ill, which seldom happened. He stood alone now, in this moment of disenchantment, discomfort, and poverty, and experienced a keen regret at the idea of losing a prospect which he had enjoyed day by day, when the others were too busy to think about it.

“What do you imagine you would like to be, Donald?” asked Uncle Aleck.

“A soldier, uncle ; like grandfather Ramsay.”

“Eh ! laddie, but that wants more money now-a-days than wits ; you have got plenty of one, if you only made use of them, and none of the other ; can’t you think of something else ? you might be an advocate.”

“I hate law ; it is so slow and dry, uncle.”

“Tut, tut, you will become interested enough as soon as you get into it. I think it would be the very best thing for you ; you must turn your attention that way ; I will speak to Dr. Maitland about it. As for you, Edith, if I were not afraid your mother and I would never agree, I would pitch my tent in Auld Reekie once more, and elect you my housekeeper ; you always bring back past days.”

Uncle Aleck meant his wife, whom Edith resembled in her gentle ways. He had

cherished the remembrance of her, cut off as she had been in early life, with all a youthful lover's warmth of passion, and an old grey-haired man's tenacity. His prosperity, unshared by her, was robbed of its value. He retired, a comparatively young man, to an estate near Edinburgh, called Craigstane, where he amused himself with farming, and sport, and had never set up a second image in her place. Rumour said Miss Honey Vinegar had cherished hopes anent the squire, and even now did not despair. She had been a schoolfellow and friend of Mrs. Alexander Seton, and he always treated her in consequence with a certain courtly respect and consideration; but whether these aspirations of the lady had their foundations only in her fond imagination, or in any latent weakness in Uncle Aleck, it was very hard to determine.

When the business of this painful afternoon

was finished, the three gentlemen took their leave, and the house of mourning was left to adjust itself to the new order of things. Mrs. Ramsay appeared no more that day.

CHAPTER V.

“Hyacinth loves I have noted—

Soft, silken approaches of something that whispers a change ;
Chrysalis stirrings that herald the full wing'd and perfected
mission ;

Timid assumptions of woman, demeanour unwonted and
strange—

Beautiful sequence of vermeil suffusion and paleness un-
bidden ;

Dream-lustred eyes that look inward on something to others
unseen ;

Reveries sudden, and maidenly languor, and sighs but half-
hidden ;

Pensive reserve overdrooping the virginal grace of her mien—
Some face hath gleam'd upon hers, and the sleep of her girl-
hood is broken.”

HOUSEHUNTING, even under a reverse of circumstances, is not without its charms to the female mind. It is a little kingdom, a new realm, which has to be conquered, settled and governed ; new ministers have to be appointed ; new laws and regulations framed and adopted. Mrs. Ramsay, as foreseen by those about her, was hard to please in the matter of houses ; she settled her affections at last, not on one of

those selected by her father, but on another, brought under her notice by Miss Honey Vinegar. It was a relic of olden times, though not really ancient ; a dwelling spared with its acre of garden ground surrounded by sheltering walls, by the relentless spirit of building ; left stranded among the entangled markings for future squares, streets and crescents.

It had once been quite in the country, close to winding lanes and hedges. It belonged, in fact, to the date when the site of Prince's Street Gardens was still undrained, and a lake lay at the foot of Castle Rock, and rippled not far from the burial-ground of St. Cuthbert's churchyard, and when a pretty villa stood in its shrubberies, where now engines scream, and long lines of cabs denote the modern railway station ; when the Haymarket was a far-lying suburb, and West Mintland Street not yet in existence.

The house, like many others of the same

date near Edinburgh, was built of grey stone, with French turrets, and irregular roofs; the rooms were not large, and there were odd corners, and steps in unexpected places; but the richly-moulded cornices, and handsome marble mantel-pieces, gave an aristocratic air, lacking in modern houses, with the same amount of accommodation. It had a little the air of Chernonceaux, and a sort of conventional stillness reigned in the garden, of which the former possessor had made the most.

It was singularly fitted for a woman in Mrs. Ramsay's position; no one would seem to be exactly poor in such a house, and yet the rooms, from their diminutive size, precluded the possibility of giving large parties. It was a higher rent than the executors thought it quite prudent to give, but Edith, who also liked the place as much as her mother did, promised to try and make up for it by increased economy in other ways.

There were large outstanding debts. These Uncle Aleck generously promised to pay off by annual instalments. Among these bills was Menzie's, where the item of eight shillings for strawberries caught his eye.

"Did you often indulge in strawberries at that price, my dear?" he asked of Edith.

"No, uncle," she answered, with some confusion; then, as he seemed to await an explanation, she told of the scene with which our story opens.

"And Donald never paid it, after all. The confusion that followed may excuse him this time, probably drove the whole thing out of his head; but you will agree with me, Edith, this sort of carelessness must not go on—you must help me by not being soft-hearted. I shall offer to pay every debt he has to day, on condition he promises to make no others beyond what his allowance will cover; and I shall ask him about this debt in particular."

"You are indeed good, Uncle Aleck," said

Edith ; “ but do you not think I might earn something.”

“ No, no, child, put that nonsense out of your head ; it is like your good heart to wish to do it, but I will never suffer it as long as I live, and have a penny to spare. The boys ought to work, and they shall.”

Miss Honey Vinegar was delighted in being consulted and deferred to by Mrs. Ramsay about the Priory, as the new house was to be called.

“ You must take this wretched light paper away, and have the walls stained a dull red,” she said one morning as she and Mrs. Ramsay and Edith were sitting in the bare drawing-room, surveying the rather dirty bunches of gold and grey grapes on a drab-ground ; “ it will set off the pictures Lord Ramsay showed such good taste in buying, to immense advantage, and gives a room such a much more uncommon style.”

Certainly, a brilliant idea ; we will give the

order to have it done immediately, on our way home, Edith. Caird can set his people on it at once."

"Ought we not to consult grandfather first," suggested her daughter.

"My dear, you know nothing about it," said Miss Honey Vinegar; "your mother must have congenial surroundings, not those offensive to a refined taste. That paper is enough to give her a fit of violent indigestion—

" 'Oh! how much more doth beauty beauteous seem,
By that sweet ornament which *taste* doth give?' "

"Keep to the original, Miss Honey, which '*truth* doth give,'" said Edith, "red walls will be no comfort if we have to go without bread and butter to pay for them."

Miss Honey's quotation had aroused old memories in Mrs. Ramsay; she stood leaning against the mantel-piece, her eyes filled with tears, and the tremble in her voice of only half suppressed emotion made the words

more affecting, as she repeated Shakespeare's sonnet :—

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought,
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste ;
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight ;
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe till e'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I now pay as if not paid before."

The old charm that once enthralled all beholders came over both her auditors as she concluded. Edith, yet the slave of her mother's outward fascinations, went up and kissed her tenderly, while Miss Honey Vinegar said, pointedly—

"The prosaic tendencies, miscalled common sense, of the rising generation, jars unpleasantly on the finer senses, and offends the æsthetic proclivities of the one, which yet survives in your mother's person." She had taken her revenge on Edith, and now turned

round with the very essence of sweetness, in tone and manner, worthy of her name, to say, "At any rate, you must put some encaustic tiles round the grate; they would suit the style of the ceiling. I will design, and draw out some for you, and get them burnt."

"Thanks," murmured Mrs. Ramsay, still tender and dewy in her pathetic mood, "you are really a great help."

Edith wondered secretly how long they would have to wait for them; and between her mother's ample quotations and Miss Honey's æsthetic proposals, despaired of getting through any of the business at all which brought them there.

Yet everything has an end, and by May the house was ready, and as much furniture as it would hold placed in it. The pictures and works of art, disposed in as excellent a position as the limited space allowed, redeemed the look of confined greatness; while the

garden was tidied, ready for the outburst of lilacs and laburnums, for which it was noted.

"This is really jolly!" exclaimed Donald, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking round with evident satisfaction.


"It's very nice," said Willie, slowly; "but we haven't the view."

"Hang the view!" said Donald. "How often do people take the trouble to look at it, when they've got one? It's much better to go out and see it; but you are such a lazy dog! I believe you would never take a walk on your own account from one year's end to another."

"You are so much my superior in every way, aren't you?" said Willie, with a degree of bitterness he seldom indulged in.


Donald was quite surprised, he was so little accustomed to receive an answer, that he watched Willie out of the room with silent astonishment, and then ejaculated—

"Cheeky, by Jove!"



One of the first callers at the Priory was Montague Dewar. His offering of primroses and wild hyacinths, which he told Edith he had gathered expressly for her in the woods of Dalmeny that morning, was not ungratefully received, though rare hothouse blossoms had been sent by other friends. The two had met in a quiet way at the house of mutual acquaintances, and his unwearied attentions Edith attributed at the beginning to the painful circumstances under which he had first entered Lord Ramsay's house; but they were too persistent to leave her long in doubt as to their meaning. He was the object of Miss Honey Vinegar's undisguised dislike and contempt. "A poor, stupid fellow," she declared him to be, "with no poetic or artistic feeling, no powers of conversation, and very commonplace manners." Perhaps a secret antagonism made Edith feel an unusual pleasure in his talk and society. He had travelled widely in Africa, America,

and Australia, not so much perhaps in the classic lands of Europe: he was saving that, he told her one evening, as a playground for business years and the rest of old age. His quiet descriptions of things and people interested Edith much more than traveller's talk in general; but what drew her to him more strongly than anything was the large widehearted charity, the willing allowance for folly and sin in others, the gentleness of the strong willed man, with his stern sense of right and wrong towards frailer people. This was apparent in every word and action. A perfect stranger in Edinburgh, his excellent capacity and quiet habits, those of a gentleman in every respect, had procured him by degrees an assured entrance into the best houses; so that no objection was raised by either of the executors, when he became a frequent visitor at the Priory. The boys liked him, especially Willie, in whom he took a kindly interest from the first.



“I think I have found the very situation for you,” he said one evening, which they were spending together at the house of Mr. Tom Seton. “I have talked it over with your grandfather.. Will you come and dine with me to-morrow, and I will invite Mr. McCorquedaille to meet you?”

“I hope I shall be able to do what he wants,” said Willie, timidly. “I’ve been hammering away at bookkeeping and double entry, and I think I understand it.”

“That’s right,” said his friend; “a capital idea. Who suggested it?”

“No one, but I knew it was what I should probably have to do.”

“Don’t be discouraged by first difficulties,” said Mr. Dewar; “the power of habit alone does wonders after a time, and brings order into the direst confusion. Mr. McCorquedaille is an old friend of mine. I knew him in Australia; and he will be far more tolerant than most people, though he has risen

entirely by his own exertions. I believe you will get on well, Willie; only you must believe in yourself."

"That's hard work, when nobody else does," said Willie. "You are the first that ever gave me an encouraging word."

"But I shall not be the last," said his friend; "the fact of earning money for yourself will give you a standing in your own eyes you have never had before, and remember, whatever happens, I am always your friend. You will do us all credit one day—perhaps," was the secret rejoinder, for his inner consciousness in no way confirmed the statement he saw Willie stood so much in need of, and which his kindheartedness prompted him to give; the more so, as he was Edith's brother, and for that reason dear to him.

The result of the meeting at his house next day was that Willie was engaged by Mr. McCorquedaille, at a salary measured far

more by his needy circumstances than by his fitness for the post—amply sufficient, that is, to supply him with clothes and pocket money, for he was systematically economical.

One evening, at the end of an unusually warm day in June, Uncle Aleck had stayed for dinner ; Montague Dewar appeared afterwards, likewise Miss Honey Vinegar. The boys were both at home, and Harry Carmichael, Donald's great friend, had come in also. It was the first time so many had assembled round them, since Lord Ramsay's death.

“ Can't we have a game of croquet ? ” Donald said, eyeing the smooth turf with glistening eyes.

“ Not yet, not this summer,” said Edith hurriedly ; “ Donald, it is too soon.”

“ I don't think so,” he answered a little crossly ; “ when I die I hope everybody won't think it necessary to make themselves miserable. Come Harry, let us have a walk ; that will not shock anybody's propriety.

People will strain at gnats, and swallow camels, eh ! old fellow ? ” he added, nudging his companion’s elbow.

“ Croquet is slow without a lot of girls,” said Harry ; “ and your sister has no eyes except for Dewar.”

“ Not for a small boy like you, perhaps,” returned Donald ; “ I think matters are getting a little too hot and strong in that quarter, myself. Who is the fellow ? ”

“ No one knows, from all I can make out,” said Harry.

Edith watched them leave the garden with a pang. Montague Dewar guessed it. “ Did I do right ? ” she asked, “ how hard it is to judge what is best when boys are concerned.”

“ Pray what have you to judge about ? ” asked Mrs. Ramsay, who had caught the last sentence.

“ Donald wanted to play croquet. Because I said it was too soon after papa’s death, he

is gone out with Harry Carmichael. I am not sure I was right."

"Quite right, my dear Edith ; I wonder at his proposing such a thing ; my boys have no sense of what is seemly in such matters. Do you not pity me, Mr. Dewar, left to bring them up without a husband's help ? "

Uncle Aleck grumbled "when you had both you seemed to care very little about either ;" but it was in too low a voice for any but Montague Dewar to hear. That gentleman answered the appeal made to him by saying—

"Too much is often sacrificed to other people's opinion. Is croquet at home worse than billiards elsewhere ? In my mind, I have often debated Donald's outspoken thought, the dead would not wish to deprive the living whom they loved of one innocent amusement."

"I entirely disagree with you," said Miss Honey Vinegar, with a briskness of contra-

diction which always characterised any diversity of taste from Mr. Dewar ; “ propriety, a sense of suitability, is the outward expression of moral and physical restraint, in educated, refined people ; it is the fine line of distinction, drawn between them and the lower classes ; it cannot be preserved too sacredly.”

“ I should be sorry to think the lower classes have no sense of propriety,” returned Mr. Dewar, quietly ; “ it has been my fortune many times to meet with striking evidences of its presence among them.”

“ Indeed ! probably you have had greater opportunities of studying them than I,” said Miss Honey, whose whim it was to be constantly insinuating Montague Dewar’s want of birth and fine breeding. He smiled, as he always did on such occasions, with an indescribable mixture of pity and amusement in the expression of his face ; then he turned to Edith—

“Don’t distress yourself,” he said in a low tone ; “I know where those young pickles are to be found ; your brother shall be home before ten.”

He took his leave at half-past nine, and Uncle Aleck left with him. As they strolled towards the stables where Mr. Seton had left his horse, he said—

“I heard you say you know where these two likely subjects are to be found ? be so good as to tell me the place, or rather take me there.”

Montague Dewar hesitated. “I don’t want Donald to think I am a spy upon him. I can better contrive to keep him out of mischief, if he thinks our meetings are purely accidental.”

“Can’t it be accidental now ? where is he ?”

“Most probably playing billiards at the Orb and Sceptre.”

“Does he do it often ?”

“Oftener than his means will allow.”

“ No wonder he fleeces his sister, the young rascal ! I must put a stop to it. Let us go in. I am not too old to challenge you for a game.”

They continued their walk, until they arrived at the place indicated. There, surely enough, on entering the billiard room, they found Donald and Harry, with three or four others older than themselves.

“ Heigh ho ! young man,” said Mr. Seton, with well-acted surprise ; “ this is your little game ? ”

“ And yours also, it appears, uncle,” said Donald saucily.

“ I can perhaps afford it better than you, sir. Who drinks all these ? ” his uncle added, pointing to the brandies and sherries standing about.

“ Not I, Uncle Aleck. I come for the love of play.”

Donald looked fearlessly in his uncle’s face, because he spoke truthfully.

“Do I drink, you fellows ?”

“No, we can’t make him,” came like a chorus from all.

“So much the better, I’m glad to hear it ; but I did not expect to find you playing the ‘man about town’ thus early in life, Donald. Excuse me, Mr. Dewar ; I should like a chat with my nephew, we must put off our game until some other opportunity ; you can finish his for him, and these young gentlemen will excuse his leaving.” So saying, he led the way out, and Donald could do nothing else but follow.

“Now then, my boy,” he began, putting his arm into Donald’s, and leading him homewards ; “let us understand each other. Has all the pocket money I have given you the last two months gone in billiards ?”

“Not all, uncle, a good deal.”

“Eight shillings went to pay Edith, for what you spent about those strawberries.”

“What strawberries ?—Oh ! you mean

for my father the day he died. I had quite forgotten it ; but I did not think Edith would have told about that."

" She did not ; I saw them down in Menzie's bill, and insisted on knowing about them ; there must be an end to such borrowing without paying, Donald ; it isn't honest, to call the thing by its proper name, and no boy has a right to sponge on his sister. I have her promise it is not to happen again. Don't try it on, and don't play billiards, till you are twenty at least. It is an expensive game, and leads to other amusements more costly still. Now go home, and don't be mean enough to punish Edith for not letting you play croquet against your mother's wish, by making her sit up till twelve waiting for you. Here is my horse. Good night."

CHAPTER VI.

"'Tis strange—to win us to our harm
The instruments of darkness tell us truths
To betray us in deepest consequence."

"DONALD, you spilt the ink on the new drawing-room carpet this morning. I am exceedingly annoyed with you."

Mrs. Ramsay's face was flushed, her hands shook, and a most decided stamp was heard under the rich folds of crape and bombazine.

"Don't excite yourself, mother. I did not do it on purpose."

" 'Don't excite yourself ' ! and ' I didn't do it on purpose ! ' I should think not ! Are my sons savages, going about doing what mischief lies in their way ? Am I mistress in the house, and your mother, that you dare to tell me not to excite myself ? Beg my pardon this instant for such impertinence, or I will write to Dr. Maitland. Do you suppose I

am ignorant how you spend, or mis-spend your evenings, and in what costly follies you waste money, and your guardians' patience? I am ashamed of being the mother of such sons!"

"At any rate, Willie does not offend in that way," answered Donald, suddenly. "Why bring his name in as well as mine? And what do I indulge in, that is unbecoming my position as my father's son?"

"Unbecoming a beggar, you ought to say," replied his mother, who seemed lashing herself into one of her worst fits of passion. "You will bring me to my grave before long."

"I shall be very sorry if you insist on worrying yourself there prematurely," replied Donald, with a sarcastic curl of his handsome upper lip. "I know perfectly well neither Harry Carmichael nor any other boy would put up with what I do. Between your scolding, Edith's preaching, and Willie's stu-

pidity, I am sick of my life in this hole of a place. Let me go into the army, and have done with it."

"Have I the control of my sons' careers?" retorted Mrs. Ramsay. "Is it by my wish Willie defiles his hands with filthy trade? If you would do as your uncle wishes, and follow Herbert Caryll-Jones' example, you would be some comfort in the house. What a pleasure he is to his parents! Intellectual, steady, always over his books, polite to his mother, dutiful to his father—"

"Always toadying his aunt, old Lady Craig-Haughtie, to get what he can out of her," went on Donald; "going to hear her favourite minister, ever at her apron-string, taking her pet pug out for a walk—a sneak, a hypocrite, and a humbug!" Donald finished up at last. "You can't mean it, mother. You don't want me to be like him, and I shan't if you do, for I hate the fellow!"

Donald was working himself up into a pas-

sion now, and stamped, while his eyes flashed.

Mrs. Ramsay sat down with her handkerchief before her face. It was hard to say whether she was weeping or not, for she had a certain pleasure in her angry, good-looking boy ; it was a picture her maternal pride delighted in.

He, concluding he had really vexed her, slunk out of the room, and betook himself to his usual comforter, Harry Carmichael, and together they sought the Orb and Sceptre.

Harry was a great contrast to his companion. Small, neatly made, of almost feminine delicacy of feature, he possessed a dogged will, under the influence of which, Donald's more open, impulsive nature, was moulded into any mode of thought or action his tempter chose.

Harry was the only child of a rich landed proprietor in Dumfriesshire, into whose hands as factor, and writer to the Signet, one piece

of land after another had fallen from his employers, who waxed daily poorer, as Mr. Carmichael grew fat in figure and purse. Harry had all the advantages of education, but made small use of them. His allowance was ample, and he was encouraged by his father to seek companions by means of it, in the society he could not aspire to enter by birth.

Among these, his schoolfellow, Donald Ramsay, stood first, especially as long as his father lived, and was accounted a rich man. Nothing was too good to set before the son of the respected judge—no treat too expensive for him to share in.

When Lord Ramsay's death revealed the true state of affairs as to pecuniary circumstances, Mr. Carmichael's attentions cooled. Harry was admonished no longer to stand treat, and advised to become gradually less intimate; but Donald's prestige among the big boys at the High School was valuable,

and not to be lightly laid aside. His friendship had saved Harry from many a licking for cheekiness and snobbery in earlier days, and now that Harry was more at home in a good set, Donald's popularity was no less useful in retaining him in it. His politeness to Mrs. Ramsay won her heart, and though Lord Ramsay, and consequently, Edith, never took heartily to him, he was suffered as a visitor, both at Moray Place and afterwards at the Priory.

This evening, Donald met him in a thoroughly discontented humour. He played badly at billiards, and lost—

“I'm sick of this; let us go for a walk, Harry. It's a shame to stop in these stifling places these long summer evenings.”

“Has yer mother been a worryin' on ye?” sneered Harry.

“Yes,” answered Donald, sullenly.

“Let me have another glass of sherry, and I am ready to go. Take one, Donald; it will *do you a world of good, man.*”

Harry lifted up the golden wine, and a strange longing to have something that would cheer him came over Donald. He watched the oily track of the sparkling liquid upon the sides of the bright crystal—

“No—I won’t begin it,” he said, as usual.

“Nonsense, I’ll stand treat, just this once,” urged Harry. “You’ve no idea how jolly it makes a fellow feel who’s a peg too low; one would think you had taken the pledge—yet I’ve seen you drink wine at home, and where it costs you nothing. *I* don’t think the worse of you for being economical, but *others* notice it.”

Emphasis has a vast power in changing the force of a little word. Harry’s *I*, implying considerate allowance for his poverty, making it less humbling to be treated by him “just for once,” conveyed a world of meaning. Then the picture of “others” talking about him, speculating on his motives, pitying him

as "poor Donald Ramsay," roused and goaded him beyond expression. It was too much for the lad, fresh from his mother's onslaught about a paltry ink-stain and expensive follies.

Throwing a half-crown to the waiter, he ordered half a pint of sherry in desperation, and drank it all.

This was about a year after Uncle Aleck's warning. Donald had kept to his promise not to drink, though he had occasionally played.

Harry watched the successive glasses going down his friend's throat with intense satisfaction. His refusal had been the only point on which he felt his power over him was lacking, though why he should rejoice it would be hard to say. He could not afford to treat him at all times, and Donald's finances were out at elbows, with billiards alone.

Under the influence of the wine, Donald challenged him for another game, and won ;

so that it was getting on for nine o'clock when the proposed walk began. His hand had not felt so steady the last few strokes, and he had the prudence to be content with his stroke of good fortune, and not go on. Taking up his cap, he walked into the open air, and it made him hilarious at once. He remained quiet some time under the spell of a new, and not unpleasant experience. What a glorious sensation went tingling through his veins, as he locked his arm in Harry's, and the two strolled towards Cors-torphine.

Harry was right—the wine had made a man of him. He thought no more of home troubles, of want of pocket money, of having yielded, after so many months of determination not to take anything away from his own home.

His legs seemed light as air—his heart like a lark for gladness; he longed to get out beyond the houses, that he might shout

and sing aloud. Harry had some trouble to prevent his doing both in the streets of Edinburgh.

At last, the beautiful Pentlands came full in view. Donald felt inclined to fly to their blue tops. A dog passed, following a galloping horse. He set up racing against them, and only gave up when dead beat and out of breath.

A little further on, they met a party of merry girls, returning from a walk in the pleasant meadows that lie between the two ridges of hills.

Donald made a rush at the foremost, and kissed her, and when he received a box on the ear for his rudeness, took off his cap with a flourish, and said—

“Thank you, my darling, that was so pleasant, won’t you do it again?”

A second girl, who had lagged behind the rest, to gather a handful of flowers from a ditch, and who saw him making towards her,

stopped short, a frightened witness of his exploit. There was such terror depicted in her innocent brown eyes, as she stood with parted lips, not daring to pass, that Donald stopped also.

“Don’t stare at me as if you were afraid I should eat you up, lassie. I won’t kiss *you*, unless you wish it. What’s the matter with me? You look as if you thought me a Hottentot. I’m not such a bad looking fellow as all that. Come, be friends and shake hands.”

“Nae, nae, dinna come near me, dinna, dinna do’t,” she almost shrieked as he made a step forward.

“Why, bless my heart! what ails you? Don’t screech till I have hurt you.”

“Ye’re fou, ye’re maist fou,” said the girl, shrinking away from him with a shudder, “ye’re no better than Sandie Patterson, when he gar’d me skirl, and ran after me ower the brig.”

“And who is Sandie Patterson? I won’t run after you; I am as sober as a judge,” the word gave him a sort of twinge as he thought of his dead father. “I never drink too much. What did Sandie do?”

“He tried to catch me, he is a big bad laddie, an’ mither does na like him. Oh! let me by.”

“Not till you tell me your name, and where you live. Now I look at you, I see you are a very pretty little girl, much prettier than the one I kissed. Shake hands, and be friends.”

“Be quick, get done with your fooling,” said Harry, who began to tire of Donald’s excitement.

“Not till she tells me her name.”

“I’m wee Maggie Græme; do let me go.”

“Bonny wee thing, cannie wee thing,
Lovely wee thing, wert thou mine,
I wad wear thee in my bosom,
Lest my jewel I should tine.”

Donald sang the verse with dramatic ac-

companiment of look and action, and Maggie, half charmed with the voice and the manner, remained quiet.

“Come on, Donald, do,” said Harry, impatiently.

“Oh! whare live ye, my bonny lassie?”

sung Donald again, not heeding his friend.

“There, doon in the muckle farm yon way,” said Maggie.

“And may I come and see you, wee Maggie?” asked Donald, affectionately; “if I don’t kiss you now? Say ‘yes,’ and I’ll let you pass.”

“Yes,” said Maggie, and when Donald drew back, she made a rush, and regained her companions. Donald kissed his hand to her, and then suffered Harry to lead him a few paces on quietly; but an empty cart passed, and before his companion could stop him, Donald said—

“Let’s have a ride.”

He began clambering up behind; the driver


for no reason, except to balk the attempt, lashed his horse, it started forwards, and Donald sufficiently unsteady, independent of the shock, tumbled over the back of the vehicle, and fell heavily to the ground. The boy was driving on with a loud laugh, and Harry, ashamed of his position, was saying crossly—

“Now, Donald, we have had enough of this sort of thing,” when both became aware he was stunned by the fall. They took him up, and found a deep gash across the right eyebrow. It was bleeding profusely.

“What the deuce shall I do?” exclaimed Harry.

He shouted to the driver, who had already stopped, and now drove back.

“It’s Maister Donald Ramsay, sure enough,” said he, “I kenn’t him the minute I had whipped the horse. We must put him into the cart, and take him to a doctor.”



“He’ll bleed to death,” replied Harry. “Here! Maggie, Nannie, whatever your name is, come back!” he called to the girls, who, suspecting an accident, had stopped, and turned round. Maggie was at his side in a few seconds.

“Is he hurt?” she asked, kindly.

“Yes, do you think your mother would let us take him to the farm, till we can get a doctor to him?”

“Ay, ay! How the bluid rins!” said the tender hearted little maiden, as the two lads raised him into the cart. “Dinna let his puir hid jolt agin the dure wood.”

With womanly quickness she ran round to the front, climbed over the seat, and squatted at the bottom of the cart. She drew the wounded head on to her lap, and carefully lifted the tangled bloody locks from the gash, and then supported each cheek on one of her soft little hands.

“Drive to mither, that gate! Quick!”

she said, authoritatively; "an ye stan' there like a couple o' daft gowkies; he'll be maist deed afore ye reach the hoose."

As the cart turned, it jolted over a stone, which made Maggie turn angrily to the driver.

"Gin ye waurna a butcher laddie, used to cuttin' an' killin' the puir beasties o' lambs an' calves, ye'd may be tak mair heed o' the stanes, an' drive douce, ye wud callant!"

Then bending over her charge, she said in a very different tone—"Puir laddie; ye hae gien me a sair fleg," and she passed her hand softly round his chin. Donald opened his eyes for a second, and smiled faintly, then he lay still as death, while Maggie exhorted him thus—

"Eh! laddie! but ye maun be tentier anither time; yer mither 'll greet sair when she hears the news, an' sees ye."

"She'll no' greet, Maggie; she'll scold," whispered Donald.

“Na, na, she’ll be aye cantie ye’re no kill’t wi’ spracklin up o’ an auld butcher’s cart, like a doited gaberlunzie lad.”

Donald smiled again, and murmured—
“Bonny wee thing,” and then said no more until they reached the farm.

Maggie’s mother was not a little surprised to find her daughter installed as voluntary nurse, in this impromptu ambulance.


“Gude save us,” she exclaimed, “what is the lassie after ?”

“Mither, ye maun tak’ the bonny laddie in ; he’s ca’ed Donald Ramsay, he’s sair doyl’t an’ cauld, ye maunna let him dee, he’s such a bonny laddie.”

“An’ what gars ye bring ony laddie, if he’s ever sae bonny, hame to me, Maggie ; I canna be fashed wi’ him,” but the good woman had no sooner caught sight of Donald, who was now deadly pale, and quite insensible, than she made instant preparations to receive him.

"Lay him here, bairns ; and you," she said to the butcher's boy, "gang for a doctor. I can bind a woun' when it's no sae gruesome as yon, but I darena try this."

The lad needed no second bidding. Fully alive to his own share in his customer's mischance, he drove to the nearest medical man, and before half an hour had passed, he was by the bedside. Cold water sprinkled on his hands and face, a draught of the same poured down his throat, again brought Donald to his senses ; but after examining him, the doctor declared it would be better not to move him that night, perhaps not the next, the wound was dangerously near the eye, and he was afraid of a slight concussion of the brain as well ; the patient was getting feverish, more so than the mere wound would account for. Harry Carmichael was not in an enviable frame of mind, conscious of being to blame. Maggie, when the two others had hesitated on being questioned about the circumstances,



had blurted out the honest truth, that the "laddie was fou," and had frightened her, though she was sorry for him "noo." Donald, only half conscious, still murmured some disjointed sentences, in which "first temptation," "mamma will scold," and "bonny wee Maggie," were distinguishable; groaned from time to time as if his head pained him, and then after the gash had been sewn up, fell into a restless slumber.

"Will you go with me and tell Mrs. Ramsay?" pleaded Harry, "need we say exactly how it happened? can't you make out he tumbled down and hit his head against a rock?"

"When that girl would tell the truth," was the doctor's contemptuous rejoinder; "you may have led him this dance, for aught I know, and you must pay the piper, young man."

"He only took three or four glasses of sherry," said Harry.

“And those you probably induced him to drink,” said the doctor. “This affair may perhaps teach you not to be quite so ready to incur the curse laid up for him who puts the bottle to his neighbour’s mouth.”

The glance of the shrewd medical man was so keen, and his expression so stern, that for once Harry Carmichael was *non-plussed*, and unequal to lying, even for his own advantage.

CHAPTER VII.

“For boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and infirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women’s are.”

MRS. RAMSAY received Edith with a burst of indignation over Donald’s undutiful conduct, as soon as she returned from a visit to Carshalton.

“Why did you place the two offences of spilling ink on a carpet, and spending his evenings idly, on the same level, as by your own account you seem to have done, mother?” was Edith’s remark, when the torrent of complaint had come to a close. “His habit of going with boys richer than himself, to play billiards at the Orb and Sceptre, is of more consequence than spoiling the best carpet that was ever manufactured; if he learns to drink, there will be an end to all peace and well-being.”

Mrs. Ramsay took the rebuke in a manner very unusual to her ordinary proud spirit, only saying—

“He must not do it; he must be sent away, sooner. I shall talk to your Uncle Aleck the next time he comes, about the matter.”

“Uncle Aleck is determined on his staying in Edinburgh, and entering the University as soon as possible,” replied Edith; “temptations abound in every town. The thing for us women is not to make vain endeavours to keep him out of them, but to strengthen his character to resist them. Donald has not the firmness of will he requires. Harry Carmichael can do whatever he likes with him; his influence is not a good one. Donald must learn to overcome evil; we are powerless to keep him from it.”

As Edith was speaking, a ring at the bell was followed by the announcement that a gentleman wished to speak to Mrs. Ramsay; the servant gave her a card.

“Doctor Millar, who can he be? I know no medical man of that name,” said her mother.

“Shall I go and speak to him, mamma?” a sense of something wrong made Edith’s heart already beat faster.

“Certainly not, Miss Ramsay; you need not assume so frequently that you are capable of managing my business better than I myself am.”

The lady marched majestically out of the room. Edith listened, and soon heard her mother’s voice saying—

“Oh! my boy! is he much hurt? I will come instantly. Edith!”

“Here, mamma,” said her daughter, at her side in a moment. “What is it?” she looked earnestly at the doctor’s face.

“Nothing of much account, nothing to alarm you,” he said, glancing at Mrs. Ramsay’s excited countenance; “it is merely a slight accident. If you would accompany

me, this lady would feel assured all was right."

"It is really not much, Miss Ramsay," put in Harry, who stood in the background; "but Donald might like to see you."

"I insist upon going; who so fit as a mother to take the place by the sick bed of her boy?" said Mrs. Ramsay. "Tell Nannie to fetch my bonnet."

"I think, madam, if you will allow me to give my opinion as a medical man, your presence might excite your son unfavourably; pardon me saying it, but I should prefer your daughter going. I will see her back in safety myself; I think there will be no occasion for her to remain all night."

There was a firmness of tone and a determination of manner in the strictly-professional man before her that were not without influence on Mrs. Ramsay, and though obstinate and self-willed under any opposition, she consented to Edith's going on

condition Nannie went with her. Dr. Millar caught at the proposal.

“If that be a confidential servant she can stay with your son ; he is with worthy people, but they may not understand the little comforts he is accustomed to. You may rest assured there is no danger, madam ; if you will tell me who is your medical man, I will give the case into his charge at once, if you prefer it.”

“I feel perfect confidence in your skill and attention, Dr. Millar,” replied Mrs. Ramsay, with her blindest smile. “If Edith brings me good accounts of my boy, I will promise not to worry about him, and remain at home as you wish.”

“I certainly think it better, madam,” said the doctor, with a second keen glance at her, one of the long looks by which doctors seem to read through skin and muscle, whether they really do or not.

Mrs. Ramsay turned away, and conversed

in her lofty manner until Edith and Nannie appeared ready dressed. They were soon in a cab, and on their way to the farm. The doctor scanned the two faces in front of him, as if uncertain which to address. Apparently the result of his inspection was favourable in both cases, for he said presently—

“From symptoms which I observed in your brother’s condition at first, and from what I have gathered since, there is no doubt this accident arose from his having taken too much wine.”

Edith betrayed her surprise by an evident start; old Nannie compressed her lips—neither spoke.

“I should not have mentioned it, but it might be as well for you to represent to him the folly of indulging in the habit, and not let the opportunity pass unimproved. A few words of kind remonstrance from a sister, may have more force than a scolding from me, or from his guardians. Such cases are but too

common now-a-days, where the love of drink begins early, quite in boyhood; unfortunately, it is not confined to our sex."

Dr. Millar looked out of the window, Edith said in a low tone, "thank you," and then he passed to indifferent subjects.

They reached the farm; Maggie opened the door.

"He hae had a braw lang sleep the while," she said joyfully to the doctor; then bestowing a look of unfeigned admiration on Edith's long-trained dress as she alighted from the cab, and swept the bare stone floor with its handsome folds, she added, "will ye no tak' up the tail o' yer goon, leddy; oor stane floors are no' made for sic gear; forby they're scrubbit weel ilka twa days."

Edith smiled at the careful little housewife, and then turned again to look at her pretty brown eyes, which the golden hair above rendered more uncommon than the darker locks which usually go with them. Her

accent, much broader than that she was accustomed to hear in the city, attracted her also.

“ You are a real Scotch lassie, and no mistake,” she said, patting her shoulder with the gentle grace that never left her ; “ my gown won’t take any harm. Where is my brother ? ”

“ In here,” said Maggie, opening the door of a room on a level with the kitchen. The first sight of Donald lying with blood-stained cloths on his head was not reassuring ; the bustle of their arrival roused him.

“ Edith ! ” he exclaimed, seeing her by his bedside. Then he turned away his face from her with so evident a sense of shame and sorrow, that it softened away every reproachful thought she might have harboured. Placing her hand on his and kissing his hair, the only part of his head visible, she whispered—

“ I understand, Donald ; it must not happen again, dear boy.”

“Don’t tell mother ; does she know it ?”

“No, but you will tell her yourself when you are well ; it would be right and honest to do so.”

Donald looked pleadingly in her face.

“I mean it,” Edith said, “it will help you to keep firm another day. Oh ! Donald ! is this the first time ?”

“The very first,” he answered hoarsely. He was sobered now, and the whole scene of his folly, the race, the kissing, the songs, the climb, the fall, the crush of the blow on the hard road, came over him. “I am ashamed ; I will never do it again, Edith.”

Maggie was standing at the foot of the bed, looking pitifully at him, her eyes full of tears, which she was furtively wiping away with the corner of her apron. She did not move ; instinct told her Donald might not like her having heard his confession, yet she felt she had no business to remain against their knowledge, so she plucked up courage to speak.

“Mither wad fain ken, gin ye’d no’ like a drappit brose afore the leddy gangs hame?”

“Is that you, wee Maggie?” Donald answered. “She was good to me, Edith; she came back and helped me when I was hurt, although I had been rude and frightened her.”

“Na, na, dinna speak o’t,” said Maggie; “ye didna kiss me; and I winna be such a gouk again as to be frightened gin ye winna gang sic a gate ony mair.”

“That I won’t, depend upon it, Maggie. Are you come to take me back, Edith?”

“We must hear what Dr. Millar says. Nannie is here; if he thinks you had better not be removed to-night, she will bring you back to-morrow.”

“I can go now,” Donald said, trying to get up, but a giddy, sick feeling came over him, and he was looking queer just as the doctor opened the door.

“Hout, tout, young man, you had better

obey orders, and lie still." Donald sank back, faint with the effort. "Do not be alarmed," the doctor added to Edith, as she turned pale; "he lost a great deal of blood before I got to him, and that makes him weak, but it may be better for him in the end. I think he must remain here a couple of nights, and then he will probably be quite able to return."

He felt his pulse, gave a few orders about diet to Nannie, said he would call on Dr. Forrest, and that one of them would be there next morning, and then told Edith he was ready to go.

"You think I need not remain?" she asked.

"You will be more useful in relieving Mrs. Ramsay's anxiety," he answered.

Mrs. Ramsay insisted in driving over next morning. She carefully took up her dress after alighting, and displayed such evident signs of not being accustomed to "such a

place," she could not call it "dirty," that Maggie's ire was aroused at once.

"What gar'd the leddie leuk sae proud, mither, wi' her sick laddie to think o'? An we hadna brought him in, he might ha' been in a waur place. I dinna like her; an she comes again, I winna open the door till her. She leukit aboot, and steppit sae fine as an auld hen, an' seemed feared to touch ony-thing."

"Eh! lassie, she was unco' proud, but she was thankfu'; see the broad piece o' gowd she gied me."

"I wadna hae took it, mither, the bonny young leddy wad hae leukit i' yer ee, an' said, 'Thank you,' with a smile that wad hae been better than gowd, though she wadna likely hae forgotten that."

Donald, who had slept fairly well, did not make his confession to his mother during her visit; he bore her frettings and condolences but indifferently, and seemed relieved when

she was gone. He was, however, so much better, that Dr. Millar on his arrival said he could go home next morning, and might perhaps get up, and sit in the garden a little towards evening. Nannie and Maggie prepared a soft seat for him in an old-fashioned arbour, looking out towards the Pentlands, and giving a side view likewise of the old farm house, which had seen better days, and bore traces of feudal times in its handsome groined arches, now serving as stables and granaries, and of the turreted roof and quaint courts, whose ruins the remains of tracery here and there made a favourite resort for sketchers and artists from Edinburgh. Grand old trees remained, sole survivors of stately woods; while a dovecote, now ruined, bore traces of having seen the lapse of many centuries. A bit of moat beside the garden, and a remnant of old grey wall, leading to a bridge, may have once formed part of slight defences, though they

could never have been considerable ; gravel paths led between broad borders, where no modern flowers had yet found their way ; white lilies, moss roses, charity, rue, wormwood, bachelor's buttons, snap-dragons, monk's hood, there were in abundance, when their respective seasons came round. Such gooseberries, and currants, raspberries, and green peas, as grew in the plot of kitchen garden, Maggie declared, were not to be matched anywhere round. Donald had said—

“Don't *you* go, Maggie,” when Nannie returned to the house, after seeing him settled in the harbour ; “tell me what brought your father to live in this nice old place. You haven't been here long, have you ?”

“A year last term,” she answered ; “daddie was offered the farm, an' he came just richt awa' ; he was no' lucky i' the auld farm, doon i' Ayrshire ; mither thocht she could maybe mak' siller sellin' a bit milk i' the toon ; her brither is minister o' ane o' the

kirks in Edinburgh, an' he advised daddie to do 't."

"Does your uncle often come to see you?"

"Ay, ay, he is maist ilka three days here; an' he sits an' leuks at the bonny hills, and walks along the burn, and talks aboot the wee bit flowers, an' gowans, an' God, an' a' the guid angels."

"I should get tired of that, Maggie," said Donald, with more honesty than good grace.

"Not an ye heard him yersel'," answered Maggie; "he'd mak' ye wish to dee, an' never sin ony mair, but gang richt straight awa' to the blue sky."

"You think me a sinner, Maggie."

"Ye're just maybe no sae quiet as he wad say ye aiblins will be, when ye're aulder, and mair canny," said she.

"You are a prudent little Scotchwoman, you leave me a chance of being better later; but you are not complimentary, Maggie."

"I dinna ken what ye mean," she answered.

"You speak the plain, honest truth."

"And what for suldner the truth be speakit, Maisther Donald Ramsay?—ye wuldna hae me lee?"

"No, no, certainly not on my account; on any account," he added, seeing Maggie look still disturbed. "If I keep steady, and work hard, you would think better of me, not so badly, at least, as you do now?"

"I dinna think ony ither than kindly o' ye noo," she said, looking up from the posie she was putting together; "ye're douce, an' frien'ly, like yer bonny sister, no' like yer leddy mither. Was yer daddie guid?"

"Very," answered Donald, seriously; "if I had thought of his last words, I should not have been so foolish last night."

"Dinna do't agen, just be a douce laddie a' yer life," said Maggie, putting her little hand on his.

Donald took it, and squeezed it hard; his heart was soft and tender from the recollection of his fall; and something in the frank goodness of the little maiden, so wise, and yet so young, barely thirteen, appealed to him in a way he never felt before.

“I think you could easily turn into an angel, Maggie.”

“Deed an’ I dinna think sae; uncle might.”

“I should like to come to you whenever I feel tempted to do wrong. I think that would help me as much as anything to be good.”

“It wad be safer just to gang an’ tell God, Maisther Donald; forby He is always near, an’ I sall be here.”

Donald sat some time silent, and thoughtful; the first time a disgraceful offence makes a boy feel ashamed of himself, it takes some time before he gets over it;—well would it be if the second had as striking an effect.

He was earnest in his wish to lead a better life at that moment ; to be less hasty and passionate, less idle, and fond of billiards ; a boy more after his dead father's heart. Taking the posie when it was finished, he said—

“ Let me have these, Maggie ; I will keep them in my pocket-book when they are faded ; they will remind me of the promise I make now, to try and be a better fellow than I have been. Uncle Aleck wants me to be an advocate, I want to be a soldier ; which shall I choose ? That will be a step towards doing something.”

“ An I were a man, I'd be a minister,” Maggie answered, thoughtfully. “ Will ye no' be ane ? ”

“ I dare not, Maggie ; I'm not good enough to preach to other people.”

“ Then be what yer uncle wishes ; mither says callants aye want to be sodgers or sailors, but they're wild fallows, an' she's

thankfu' she had but ane lassie to bring up."

"A few more like you wouldn't have signified, Maggie. What made you so kind to me in the cart? I felt your soft little hands about my head, though it wasn't clear, and I didn't quite know what I said."

"Deed an' I was sair to see the bluid rinnen frae ye; an' ye hadna kissed me. I like ye weel eneuch noo ye're sober, laddie."

Donald smiled, her old-fashioned ways and talk interested him, there was something so different to the manners of town bred girls, that he sat and looked at her until Nannie appeared round the corner of the harbour. She had not said a word to him respecting the cause of his accident, having been afraid to irritate him hitherto; and overhearing the dialogue between the pair, as she came noiselessly over the grass, she resolved to let Maggie's advice stand in the place of any from her.

“Mistress Ramsay and Miss Edith may do as they think fit,” was her wise conclusion; “it’s no’ wise to chafe a sore shoulder, and my auld hid could think o’ no better discourse than you, lassie, hae gie’d him.”

So Nannie held her tongue, and got her young master back to the house instead. The night again passed well, Donald’s resolution of submitting to his uncle’s wishes gave him a peace of mind he had not known before, when thinking of his future prospects.

He was welcomed home with open arms. The thought of the confession Edith demanded fidgeted him, and he tried to summon up courage all day long to make it, but the hours passed, then days slipped away, afterwards they grew into weeks, and Donald had quite let the thing slip out of his mind. Edith thought of asking him about it more than once, but he was so unusually good, and Uncle Aleck so thoroughly content with the

turn his misbehaviour, and the repentance that followed it, had taken, that Donald's offence was visited mildly, even by him. Edith concluded also it was better to let it rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLI.

“ Stay :

I prithee, tell me what thou think'st of me.”

VIO. “ That you do think you are not what you are.”

“ Good evening, Mrs. Græme ; I am come to show you and Maggie how I look without a dirty rag round my head, and in my sober senses,” the last words were spoken in a lower key. It was Donald reporting himself for the first time at the farm, after his recovery.

“ Where is Maggie ? ” He looked round the kitchen, and became aware of a shy little face, peeping at him from the half-opened staircase door.

“ Weel, weel, I'm maist glad to see ye leuk so hale and cantie,” said the good wife, stroking the handsome boy down his straight shoulders, and patting him in a motherly way on the back.

“ Maggie won't come and speak to a dis-

reputable fellow who gets fou', tumbles out of butchers' carts, and has to be carried into decent people's houses, giving them no end of trouble. I didn't think you would be so proud as that, Maggie."

Then Maggie threw open the door, and bounded down the three or four remaining stairs, and took his proffered hand.

"I'm no' proud," she said, "I was only keekin' to see an ye were a' richt, canny, an' douce, as ye promised ye wad be."

"I'm grown such a good lad, my uncle is quite proud of me, Maggie. I have promised to be an advocate, though I don't like it;" here Donald made a wry face. "He was so pleased, he gave me a five pound note on the spot." He pulled a packet out of his jacket pocket, and held it out to Maggie.

"What is it?" she asked.

"A present for you, Maggie; my conscience told me I should never have had that five pound note but for your persuasions, so I

spent five shillings on a present for you, by way of gratitude."

"Why for suld ye spend the guid siller?" answered Maggie; "mither mak's me put a' mine i' the savin's bank; dinna yer leddy mither tell ye to dae the like?"

"I'm afraid we don't patronise savings banks much," said Donald, with a comical smile; "my pocket has a large hole in it, where the money runs through."

"Can ye no' pit a pair o' daddie's breeks on, while mither mends it?" said Maggie, with a concerned expression of face.

"No, no; Nannie shall see to it when I get home," laughed Donald; he did not like to let her know the hole was only a figure of speech. "I'm sorry you don't like the book, Maggie."

"Wha said I didna like it?" she returned; "I said it was sair ye suld thraw the siller awa'."

"It's not thrown away if you are really

pleased Maggie;" he went and stood behind her, for she had taken off the wrapper, and was looking at the red and gold binding admiringly.

"It's aboot strange countries, mither ; 'Far off,'" read Maggie aloud ; " it's a bonny title."

" Ye hae na thankit the young gentleman for 't," said Mrs. Græme, " whare are yer manners, lassie ? "

" I don't want any thanks," said Donald ; " if only it is what she likes."

" Oh ! ay, she's gey pleased wi't," said the mother, " she's aye wantin beuks, its ower guid o'ye to think o't."

" I looked at a workbox and a desk, Maggie ; but I fancied you would like to sit in the old arbour and read this, was I right ? "

Maggie's eyes were twinkling with delight, but her words could not flow freely, and at last she fairly ran out of the room, leaving Donald with her mother.

“Her heart is fu’, but she’s bate, an’ canna’ say thank ye,” said Mrs. Græme, “she hae talkit o’ ye maist days sin’ ye gaed awa’, Maisther Ramsay; an’ wondered gin ye’d come back again. She’s no’ like ither lassies, she thinks a deal mair ’an she says. She hae read a’ the beuks there, time an’ often.”

Donald went up to the little bookcase, and examined its contents. There was Buchanan’s “History of Scotland,” a volume of Burns’ poems, the “Cottages of Glenburnie,” a Gazetteer, one of Scott’s novels, a “History of the Covenanters,” and a book of sermons—not a very large selection, and not particularly interesting to a girl Maggie’s age.

Like other people with few advantages, Maggie had made the most of those she had.

“Ye cudna’ hae dune better, Maisther Donald,” reiterated the good natured farmer’s wife, seeing him still unsatisfied.

“I am very glad,” said he, looking out of the window.

Maggie was coming up the path with a handful of flowers. "May I go to see her, Mrs. Græme?"

"Ay, ay, ye can hae a bit talk with the lassie, gin ye will," said the mother; "an yer mither'll no' wonder where ye're stoppin' sae lang."

"I've plenty of time," replied Donald. "We don't go to bed at nine in the town;" and he escaped into the garden.

"Are those flowers for me, Maggie? I've got the last still."

"Are ye sure they're no' thraved awa'?" said she with a mischievous look; "did ye no' gar yer servin' hizzie tak' the auld rubbish, an' mak' an end o't?"

"Maggie!" exclaimed Donald, and taking out his pocket book, he showed her some of them carefully pressed, and dried.

"Whiles ye'hae thae, ye no want mair," she said, putting the fresh bouquet behind her.

“What is the matter with you to-night, Maggie? you are cross. Don’t you like me to come and see you?”

“Please yersel’ about it,” she replied.

Donald was not accustomed to such off hand ways. All the girls of his acquaintance were delighted to have him take the slightest notice of them; he had some trouble indeed to keep out of their way, and not be overwhelmed with their attentions.

“There’s daddie,” said Maggie a little more amiably; “will ye no’ gang and leuk at the kye? We hae a new ane, we ca’ her ‘Beauty’; she’s frae the old place doon i’ Ayrshire.”

Maggie tripped down to the wicket gate leading to the byre, across the loan. Amongst the cows she seemed thoroughly happy and at home; petting one and then another, while the creatures seemed grateful for her notice.

“Good evening,” Donald said, as the farmer gave him a hearty greeting.

“ Look,” said Maggie, holding up her book ; “ ye maunna handle it till ye’re washed, daddie, it’s aye fine.”

“ Wha hae gi’ed ye sic a braw thing yer daddie maunna touch it ? ” said Mr. Græme. She pointed to Donald.

“ I wanted to show you I had not forgotten your kindness, and Maggie’s above all,” said Donald.

“ It waurna muckle to thank for,” said the honest farmer ; “ gin ye dinna dae the like agen.”

“ I shall never be such a fool all my life-time,” said Donald decidedly.

“ Then it’s a’ richt ; but ye suldna trust ower muckle to guid intentions ; ye maun leuk to a better strength ’an yer ain, Maisther Ramsay.”

The strong features of the sunburnt man assumed a softened expression, and he looked kindly at the boy, standing there in the confidence of youth, and inexperience.

“Dinna gang wi’ the graceless, an’ the wicked lads o’ Edinburgh ; an’ dinna drink ; the deevil dissolves himsel i’ the bottle, and cooms oot agen i’ noisy folly. Ye maun bear with plain words, young sir. I hae needed neither wine nor strong drink a’ my days, thank the Lord, who showed me the error of my ways lang syne ; t’wall be sair wark for yer mither, an’ yer bonny sister, gin they see’d ye live the drunkard’s life, an’ dee the drunkard’s death ; ’tis a waefu’ gate to gang, an’ it aye cooms on by sic smaa degrees a man kin’s naethin’ about it till it’s too late.”

“I know you are right, and mean well, Mr. Græme,” said Donald, a little piqued at the long exhortation, “but I’ve quite made up my mind not to offend any more, and I am very determined.”

“That may be ; we’re a’ stark and stiff till the moment o’ temptation cooms. Then the strong drink gets the whip hand o’ the strong will, and just turns it roun’ the wrang way-

Ye maun be feared o' yer ain sel', laddie, o' young Donald Ramsay, an' measure his weakness."

"Indeed, you shall be witness how firm I mean to be," said Donald. "I am beginning to work already in an office, to learn to be a lawyer."

"It's a braw business, an' niver lacks wark," said the farmer. "Folks aye quarrel, and maun be set richt by the law, though it aiblins pits 'em wrang first."

"My father was a great lawyer," said Donald; "you must have heard of Lord Ramsay."

"Oh! ay; he was a shairp mon, a clever mon, an' a guid, upricht judge. Will ye no' tak' a bit supper wi' us, Maisther Ramsay, noo ye're come so far?"

"Thank you," said Donald, to whom the prospect of seeing what humble life was acted as an additional spur to a hearty appetite.

The cloth, though coarse, was as white as snow. After rather a long grace, the porridge was served, and then came home-cured bacon, and good home-made cheese, blue with mould.

It was so different to his ordinary food, that Donald ate with relish.

“I think you have a happier time of it than we townspeople,” he said; “no fuss, no fashion, and fiddle-dee-dee. We waste half our time waiting to be waited on at table, and at other times, too.”

“Ay, there’s muckle fash about servin’, nae doot,” said Farmer Græme; “but it gie’s employment to the puir, an’ the Lord wadna hae suffered distinctions to be, an’ they waur na usefu’. I aye think Kings, an’ Lords, an’ Commons is better than Republics, after a’, though I’m a Whig, as my father an’ grandfather were before me.”

Darkness had long come, and Donald rose to go—

“May I pay you a visit now and then?” he asked, with his sunniest smile.

“Gin yer leddy mither hae nae objection,” replied the farmer.

“Oh! my mother would be only too glad, to be sure I was out of mischief,” replied Donald, naïvely; “I shall tell her I’ve been. I am to have the flowers, then, Maggie?”

She had laid them beside his plate at supper, and he now stuck them into his button-hole.

With a warm “Good night,” Donald departed.

He kept his word, and told Mrs. Ramsay where he had spent his evening, and why he wanted no supper.

“It was so funny, mamma; but the bread, and the bacon, and everything were so good.”

“I’m glad you liked it,” was all Mrs. Ramsay’s reply, and as she made no further remark, Donald construed her silence into a

permission for him to go to the farm as often as he liked.

His next visit was under different circumstances.

It was the middle of October. Harry Carmichael and he took a couple of guns, one Saturday afternoon, to shoot small birds. They wandered some distance, not shooting much, and were returning not far from Mr. Græme's farm, although on a neighbour's occupation, when a covey of partridges rose right at their feet, out of some gorse by the roadside.

Neither had a license. The two looked at each other for a moment ; the temptation was great.

"Who'll be the wiser?" asked Harry, and Donald's gun went off, bringing a bird down.

Harry followed suit, and brought down another

They had just slipped them into their

pockets, when a man's head appeared over the adjoining fence, and a gruff voice demanded a sight of their licenses. The youngsters looked at each other.

"I am sorry, gentlemen; but as you haven't any, you must give me your names."

"Who the deuce told you we hadn't any?" said Harry; "we didn't—keep your impudence till it's wanted."

The man had the dress and appearance of a gamekeeper.

"At any rate, you've no business shooting so near my land," said a second voice.

This time it was a farmer who spoke—

"Show your licenses, or we'll have you up before the Court."

"Better tell the truth, as we haven't any," said Donald, in a low tone.

"Better take to our heels," muttered Harry—"you that way, I this."

No sooner said than done. Harry was

soon running homewards, pursued by the farmer.

Donald sprang over the opposite hedge, with the gamekeeper after him. It was a determined chase. The latter whistled a black retriever, which was soon over both hedges.

Donald turned—it was coming full at him. He remembered he had another charge, and fired. The dog rolled over. He had gained some yards on the man, but aggravated by this second offence, he redoubled his efforts to catch Donald.

The fugitive debated whether to throw down his gun, but a moment's reflection told him nothing was more likely to lead to detection.

With a tremendous leap he cleared the fence on the further side of the field, and a ditch beyond it. The gamekeeper either forgot it, or was tired by the chase, and tumbled in. This gave Donald a second

chance. He doubled back into a small planting, while the man was picking himself up, and gained the shelter of a wall. Fortunately no one was near. He saw the game-keeper looking about as if for some one to help.

There was a second planting not far off. This he also gained unseen, and while the man was hunting in the first, he regained the road.

Harry and the farmer were nowhere to be seen; but he dared not keep to the road, lest he should light on the latter coming back.

“There’s the Græmes’ farm, I’ll take refuge there,” Donald said.

He thought the man might have guessed his dodge, and on looking, saw him making over the first field. His long legs stood him in good stead. Clearing the hedge, he ran as fast as he could, and had left a good distance between his pursuer and himself, as he reached the garden, and leaping the burn, stood beside the arbour. Maggie was there. She

heard the noise, and came out, looking frightened.

“Hide me somewhere, Maggie,” he said. “There is a man after me—quick, or I shall be put into prison.”

He said this hoping to bring her to a sudden resolution. It did it effectually.

“Here, here,” she said, as he was preparing to enter the house.

She ran through the wicket, across the farm road, through the buildings, to a low ridge of rock overhanging a meadow, close to a sudden turn of the brook. Putting aside some alder bushes, she ran up some natural steps, and showed a hollow, completely screened from below. It was barely large enough to hold the two, and Donald had to crouch.

There was a little rocky seat jutting out inside, a ledge which served as a shelf, and here Donald saw some things that might belong to a girl's play-hours.

“This is first-rate,” said Donald; “he’ll never think of looking here. No one but you saw me, and if he asks at the house, they’ll all be as innocent as doves.”

“I thocht o’ yon,” said Maggie; “gin I had bin there, an’ he speered after ye, I maun hae tell’t. Noo mither needna lee.”

“You have a great horror of lying, Maggie. I believe you would not tell a lie to save your life.”

“I dinna think I wad; I hope I wadna do’t,” she answered simply.

“Would you to save mine, or any other body’s?”

“I just hope I winna hae the temptation pit afore me, Maisther Donald.”

“You are a dear, good little soul, Maggie,” Donald said, getting hold of both hands; “this is the second time you’ve helped me out of a scrape.”

“Dinna talk—I hear voices.”

They stood silent. She had pushed him

back, and stood in front, ready to defend her fortress.

Donald half wished they might be discovered, to see how she would screen him without telling the lie she so much dreaded. But Maggie was not tried. The two men passed not thirty yards from their hiding-place.

Farmer Græme was assuring the farmer he had not seen any one, that he must be mistaken about the direction the young man had taken. He remembered hearing shots, but was quite sure there was no one in the house, or in the farm buildings. He was welcome to search where he liked; he was not the man to harbour poachers, etc.

“What is a poacher?” asked Maggie, when they were at a safe distance.

“A low fellow who shoots other people’s game, birds, hares, or rabbits,” answered Donald.

“Have you shot anither’s hares or rabbits?” she asked.

“Why—yes—but I’m not a poacher. I didn’t mean to do it; they do.”

“An’ why for then didna ye leave the gun at hame, Donald Ramsay?”

“Because any body may shoot sparrows and blackbirds, and such things, but not partridges,” said he; “I made a mistake, and bagged this. At least, I shot it in a hurry before I thought what the consequences might be. Harry Carmichael was with me! he killed another.”

“I dinna think ony guid ever cooms o’ yer gangin’ wi him,” said Maggie. “Is na he the dark callant that was wi’ ye the night ye first cam’ here?”

“Yes—but I fired first. You must take this to Mrs. Græme, and ask her to roast it for you.”

“Mither ’ll no’ cook what is na hers, an’ I winna eat it; keep the puir beastie yer-self.”

“I can’t, I dare not take it home.”

“Ye maun hae dune a muckle wrong thing

gin ye daurna let ony bodie ken aboot it. I winna tak' the birdie, ye maun bury it."

"Very well, let us bury it," said Donald, anxious to get rid of the burthen.

"I'm no' sure ye suldna tak' it back, an' say ye're sorry aboot it," said Maggie. "Wha's birdie is it?"

"The man's who farms the land next your father's. But he will most likely take me before the justices, and they'll put me into prison, and it will be your fault, Maggie."

"Better gang to prison gin ye deserve it than do wrang, and not tell o't, laddie. Oh! Donald, does yer mither no' tell ye ye suldna lee and steal?"

"No. I learned it at school though, Maggie. My mother is too busy writing, and visiting, to teach me what is good. I learn a great deal more every time I see you than I have done all my life before."

"My mither taught me lang, lang syne, when I was a wee bit childie not higher 'an

that," she marked the height on the rock, and stood looking at her companion with wondering eyes, to which pity lent a kindly, tender gleam.

"I think somehow we learn the wrong things," said Donald, musingly; "I must not walk into the room with my cap on, nor sit down if I'm ever so tired, when a lady is standing, nor put my hands in my pockets when they are perishing with cold, nor let a person see I don't like them, if I hate them like Old Nick himself; and yet we often tell lies to appear polite, say we are out when we are at home, admire something or somebody that's downright ugly, and flatter and humbug one another."

"I dinna ken naethin' aboot it," said Maggie; "but I'm gey sair for ye."

"You won't tell of me, then, to Farmer What's-his-name? I promise not to do it again till I take out a license; now let's bury the bird."

Maggie consented, although not yet satisfied. Donald dug a hole in the meadow with a bit of stick, put the partridge in, and rolled a large stone over it.

“There, Maggie, the scar on my forehead tells me never to drink ; this stone will say, ‘do not steal,’ you repeat often enough ‘do not lie.’ I shall be quite a reformed character before you have done with me, little girl—now if you’d only keep this gun here for me for a day or two, I shall have no opportunity of shooting other people’s game, and can come one night and fetch it. Let it stand here in your little cave. Good night, Maggie dear ; thank you.”

The little maiden stood and watched him over the meadow, till he disappeared in the blue October fog that hung over the burn. How little we know whether we may not be prophesying our own future.

CHAPTER IX.

“The dreary round of labour,
Long weariness and fear,
Neglect, and blight, and failure,
May make us downcast here ;
But there is hope and gladness,
Borne on the south wind's wing,
When breath'd o'er beds of violets,
It ushers in the spring.”


POOR Willie found a clerk's desk about as hard a seat as it is possible to choose. While Donald, on leaving the High School, was attending lectures, getting a good deal of amusement out of life in general, and above all, making himself extremely happy with his stolen visits to Maggie and her father's farm, which even his chosen friend Harry Carmichael knew nothing about, Willie was experiencing the bitterness of not being considered clever, and of not having a fortune to make up for want of wits. He was not popular among young ladies, although a few good-natured elderly ones declared

with Montague Dewar that he had a great deal more in him than people gave him credit for, and there was scarcely a subject he could not talk upon, if people would only try him. But Willie naturally preferred younger ladies ; yet if ever he engaged in a few moments' conversation with one, he could see anxiety depicted on her countenance, to be rid of him, before arousing the laughing attention of her friends, and being teased for having so much to say to that " queer Willie Ramsay." Fashion is nowhere more tyrannical than among young girls—the one youth who is the rage, has all the others sacrificed to his perfections, and is the cynosure of all eyes until he is unwise enough to declare a preference, when his value declines at once. A plain girl, however, with a sharp tongue, or pleasant manner, can always command a certain amount of attention from the opposite sex ; while a shy, awkward lad is universally tabooed. Willie consequently cared

little for society, but as invitations regularly came for him, his mother insisted on his going sometimes, that he might, as she expressed it, "have a chance of seeing how gentlemen behave, and imitating their conduct as far as possible."

Mrs. Caryll-Jones always gave an annual party; it was generally something quite unlike other people's assemblies, and the usual entertainments of the Edinburgh season, and, therefore, invitations were eagerly sought after. Nearly two years after Lord Ramsay's death, while *mauvaise honte* still made Willie's hands feel gigantic in proportion to the rest of his upper person, and his legs longer by half than they ought to be, he found himself squeezed into a corner, one of about a hundred and fifty other sufferers, in Mrs. Caryll-Jones' classically furnished drawing-room. All Mrs. Caryll-Jones' tastes were classical, and had been from childhood, she

declared, and as they had not lived more than fifteen years in Edinburgh, people had to take her at her word. She wore her hair in Greek fashion, low on her forehead, with a knob behind, and three gold bands passing over the top; a white cashmere dress, with a golden girdle, long sleeves, very short in front, looped up with golden braid; a skirt, disposed in a similar way over the right leg, a very tight fitting underskirt, edged with gold, reminded the beholder this particular evening of the early Hour in Guido's Aurora, who steps beside the chariot of the Sun, with a free and dauntless gait, and considerable development of limb. If that member in Mrs. Caryll-Jones were as beautiful as her arms, she would have beaten her classic model into smithereens, by adhering entirely to the costume in the *fresco*. She was a fair Greek scholar, better at least than any other lady in Edinburgh; no wonder, therefore, that her curtains were edged with



Greek borders, and draped to perfection over marble busts of Mr. and Mrs. Caryll-Jones, whose faces, unfortunately, were of an unusually Anglo-Saxon type ; but that was not much perceived, under a careful disposition of massive folds of maroon velvet. Hanging lamps of indisputably beautiful Corinthian designs, alabaster vases of elaborate design, copied from antiques, Ionian tables, and Doric chairs, the outlines of which survive in dilapidated Greek friezes, where Niobe and other uncomfortable characters may have sat, not lounged—far more adapted for sight than use ; acanthus mouldings on the ceilings, a sort of altar to hold a candle, where Mrs. Caryll-Jones, seated in a faultlessly artistic light, occasionally read in a highly dramatic way to her enraptured visitors. Pictures of Greek history, life, and dress, or we might say undress, adorned the walls, and had Greek fire been available, Mrs. Caryll-Jones would no doubt have had it

instead of common coals. There was to be one of Shakespeare's plays read this evening, *Troilus and Cressida*. Mrs. Caryl-Jones took the part of Cressida; a little girl who did not look more than sixteen took that of Helen, and surprised everybody, by giving it with wonderful appreciation of the character and artistic talent. Willie, who had not been asked to read, though Donald had a strong part assigned him, sat near her, and was one of her most attentive listeners; became oblivious in fact of everything except Helen's animated voice and features. Apparently his interest was not lost upon her, for without any introduction she turned round to speak to him during the pause for refreshment in the middle of the play.

"Is there anything to be had except olives and the honey of Hymettus?" she asked, with a pleasant smile.

"Shall I take you in, and we will find out?" replied Willie, waking up to sudden politeness.

“Thanks, I began to think I must suggest taking somebody in myself. There are the Christian refreshments of tea and coffee, I am glad to see,” she added, as they reached the table; but she laughed merrily when Willie returned with a cup in one hand and a jar of Hymettus honey in the other. “Give me a *soupçon* on this biscuit. I hate wine, and olives, too, but shall do very well on these Pagan dainties. Look, the biscuits are the shape of the traditional horns with which Meleagher fed his hounds. You are fond of Shakespeare?” she went on, with a pleasant, straightforward look that appealed to Willie at once.

“Very, especially as you read him,” he answered; “it seems as if real people were talking.”

“You must wait and hear Mr. Caryll-Jones before you say that. For my part, I never feel any stories so natural, or meet with any people who think and speak so

much like as we do now as those I find in Shakespeare. I scarcely read anything else but his plays in my spare moments, and am quite used to his style."

"Are you still at school?" Willie ventured to ask. She looked scarcely sixteen in her simple white frock and blue ribbons, and her hair loosely tied with the same colour in a sort of bunch at the back of her head, two or three curls rippling down her neck, detached from the rest.

"No, no, I left a year ago," she said merrily; "do I look such a bread-and-butter miss that you give me credit for regular schooling still? I am Nellie Carnegie; mamma has taken a house here for the winter, that I may study in the School of Art. I know all about you."

"Do you?" said Willie, pleased, but not altogether surprised, as he had heard of her, though he had never yet seen her.

"Yes, you are in Uncle McCorquedaille's office. He says you hate it."

“How does he know that? I never said so to any one.”

“No, no, he says you are a thorough good fellow, and plod on and on; only he suspects you of something else, not quite of the same nature as book-keeping.”

“Of what?”

“Shall I tell you?” Nellie leaned forward, and said something in a very low voice. Willie’s pale face was lighted by a sudden flush. “You need not look so modest, it’s nothing to be ashamed of; if I were you I would persevere, and go on till I became a real good hand at it. I don’t mean to daub pictures that are no good to any one. I shall work till I can do something that counts—illustrate books, or paint well enough to make money. Mamma is poor, you know. I should like to be able to help her when she grows old.”

“Which is your mother?” asked Willie, a great desire coming over him to see the woman who had brought up so charming a

girl, with two or three accomplishments at her fingers' end, and above being ashamed to be seen talking to him.

"There she is, standing next to Mr. Caryll-Jones. We are old friends you know. I like both Mr. and Mrs. Caryll-Jones, because they always recognise talent wherever it is to be found, no matter in what station. Some of these Edinburgh magnates seem to think only people with handles to their names can do anything well. I'm not like mamma, am I? She declares I'm the image of papa, so he wasn't handsome. Mamma was—both she and Aunt McCorquedaille were beauties. You are to be asked there to dinner next Sunday, to meet us. I asked Herbert Caryll-Jones to put you near me this evening, that I might see what you were like beforehand. People are going back to their places." Nellie rose; Willie offered her his arm, too much surprised at such a novel state of affairs to say a word. "Mamma, this is

Willie Ramsay. You have heard Uncle McCorquedaile speak of him. You may as well be introduced, as we are to meet on Sunday."

Mrs. Carnegie gave Willie a cordial shake of the hand, a few pleasant, quiet words; then he took Nellie to her seat, and silence reigned once more.

It was a sensible, as well as enjoyable, way of passing an evening. Some read extremely well; others, of whom better things might have been expected, as badly. But the change of voice and manner among so many different characters, prevented it becoming monotonous.

Now and then, some young lady more intent upon the impression she was making on the gentleman of her choice than on her duties, forgot when her turn came; but, in general, there was scarcely a hitch. When the play came to an end, Willie conducted Miss Carnegie downstairs, waiting in the

draughty hall while she put on her wraps, to young Herbert Caryll-Jones' disgust, who had to take Mrs. Carnegie instead. When Nellie put her hand in his arm, Willie said almost in a whisper—

“May I bring some of my —— with me?”

“Yes, yes, I understand; do.”

“And you will tell me if you think they are worth anything?”

“Don't be angry if I say some of them are great rubbish. I probably shall; my master said so of all my sketches. I shall say, as he did to me—‘Try again, and don't think you are to be an Angelica Kauffman all in a hurry.’ But you won't mind?”

“Oh! dear no,” said Willie, whose one idea just then was, he should like anything she said or did, be it ever so trying.

“Good night,” she said, popping her neatly-gloved little hand out of the window; “don't be late on Sunday, we can have a talk before dinner.”

Willie literally did not know whether he stood on his head or heels, with so much that was agreeable coming upon him like a shower of rose leaves. His mother's voice in the hall recalled him to his senses effectually.

“Why are you standing there in the cold, Willie, like one in a dream? See if the carriage is anywhere near, and don't look so much like a donkey!”

Willie could understand this; it was the old life come back. Herbert Caryll-Jones stood near, listening to his humiliation with evident pleasure. Willie comforted himself, however, with the thought of Sunday, as he took his seat by the coachman, in the bitter cold, to escape more hard words from Mrs. Ramsay.

No one ever interfered with his goings out and comings in; he was never missed, so that his invitation to Mr. McCorquedaille's was not much heeded. When he arrived, Nellie was not in the drawing-room. She soon

appeared, however, and, to Willie's way of thinking, looked nicer in her comfortable winter dress trimmed with fur, than she had in evening costume.

"You wonder at seeing me in morning attire," she said ; "we have been so much abroad, that we have got out of the habit of dressing every evening. No one does it there, except for balls and large assemblies. Uncle McCorquedaille says I may do exactly as I like in his house, and I think I look best in my day dresses."

"You look very nice," said Willie, with great sincerity.

"Now, then, let us go to that window, and look at some of your things; you've brought them? The others won't be down yet."

She led the way to a pleasant window, where a fair prospect lay spread out before them, not so fine as that at Moray Place, yet beautiful in the ruddy winter sunset. Willie

pulled out a bundle of papers with feverish anxiety, and, laying them on her lap, turned to the window, with all his old awkwardness and shyness coming over him. He dared not watch her countenance, and therefore did not see the smile that spread over her face as she finished two or three of the shortest.

“Not so bad, but you use tremendously fine words; whoever heard of vacuum in poetry? You must read Chaucer, and Spenser, and some other old poets! their adjectives are so apt, and yet simple and sweet as a Dutch landscape. Ah! this is really beautiful!” she had risen and stood near him.

“When did you write it?”

“The day after my father’s death.”

“Was he fond of you? Did you miss him?”

“He was not unkind to me,” Willie answered; “but he did not care much for me. I was very fond of him.”

“ He must have been a fine character, if all you say here is true.”

“ He was ; here is another ; I wrote it the day after seeing you.”

Nellie laughed, and blushed a very little when she came to the end. “ It is pretty, and ends easily.”

“ I never felt so happy before,” said Willie ; “ the words seemed to run from my pen, Miss Carnegie, without much thinking.”

“ Call me Nellie at once. I must call you Willie ; Mr. Ramsay is so formal ; we shall see a good deal of each other this winter, and shall have to do it before long. I feel we are going to be good friends, and it's no use keeping up formality.” She was looking straight at him, with her honest blue eyes. “ You shall write sonnets and short pieces,” she went on, seeing Willie was quite too much overcome to answer, “ and when they are collected into a book, I will illustrate them, and when it's published, you shall give me a fifth

of the profits ; that will be only fair, you know."

"Oh ! Nellie, you are going on too far ahead ; it will never come to that ; you don't know how stupid I am."

"You don't know how clever you are," she answered saucily ; " no one does until they find out their proper groove—a person who writes such verses as those to your father's memory, has a poet's nature in him. Don't give me credit for being a witch," she said, as Willie still looked bewildered, "and seem as if you expected me to fly up the chimney on a broomstick ; spoiling your appetite for dinner. I knew what sort of poetry it was you wrote, for I read a piece you dropped in the office ; uncle picked it up, and liked it so much, he showed it to me, and I was pleased with it—it was sad—so sad, I almost cried when I read it. You have not had a cheery life, I should think, from those verses."

"Not very," replied Willie ; "perhaps it

has been my own fault partly for being unsociable, and unlike other people. I wondered where those lines went to. I meant to burn them, though I couldn't help writing them. I don't think it is right to indulge in such feelings."

"Neither do I," said Nellie, "still they were very touching; they just seemed to be written with tears, and I could almost hear sighs as I read them; yet you have a sister, and she looks sweet and good."

"Yes, Edith is never unkind," replied Willie; "but I think she forgets me altogether, somehow. She has a great deal to think about, she is engaged too, you know."

"Yes, to Mr. Montague Dewar, I like him, and when people are engaged, are they supposed to think of nothing and nobody else but their lover? I should hate that, mine will have to find some other object, besides me, for I intend to stick to my painting, and give it a great share of my time and attention;

and he had better not be jealous. Don't you ever write prose ? ”

“ I have never tried yet,” replied Willie ; “ unhappiness takes naturally to rhyme and rhythm.”


“ Yes, moan and groan, heart and part, grief and brief, life and strife, and all that sort of thing ; but you are going to be happier now, and will get out of yourself into the beauty and joy that is outside all of us. I can see from these other things,” she had stopped, and read one or two other poems, “ that you have all an artist's love of nature, only you cannot draw, except in words, you must come and stay at Loch Lomond with us, when the hills are purple with heather, and the smooth water reflects them in all their gorgeous colours.”

“ You are good and kind, Nellie, but would Mrs. Carnegie like it ? ”

“ Uncle McCorquedaille would, and that's the same thing. Mamma is very fond of him,

he is so kind to us. I don't know where we should have been now but for his care in business matters. I have grand relations on both sides, you know, and they are very nice, but like ourselves, as poor as church mice. Uncle borrows mamma's money, and rolls it over and over in his business, and adds a little to both interest and principal every year. I shall be an heiress after all, I expect, and not be obliged to work for my living, as I had a wish to do. Things won't go in this life exactly as one wants them; the best way is to cover up the disagreeables we can't get rid of, as the ants, or the bees (I forget which) are said to do, with wax, or dirt; the very fact of having to hide them makes us happy."

Willie looked at the sensible pleasant young face, and drank in her words as a thirsty garden sucks in water. That Sunday evening finished the revolution beginning in his thought, and character, though his home



habits were hard to break through; so that his friendship with Nellie went on as unobserved, as did Donald's with Maggie. Sure of a sympathiser, as well as of a wonderfully judicious critic of all his poetic attempts, the routine of daily work rolled on almost unfelt, while he reckoned on the pleasanter occupation that was to follow. His very person seemed to expand under the influence of Nellie's gaiety, and the sunshine of her friendliness. His eyes always fine, now assumed a degree of spirit and life before unseen in them; the dead look of hopeless despair had gone; the strong curves round his mouth relaxed, and he learned how to smile. One day Donald came to Edith with a face of genuine alarm.

“ I can't think what has happened to Willie, he is laughing in his room like a madman; I knocked at the door to hear what was the matter, but he said he was all right. I suppose he is;” but Donald closed the door with an expression that seemed to say, “ I

think you ought to have a straight waistcoat ready on the premises."

"Poor Donald thinks himself so very wise. Are you aware how you all foster his self-conceit, Edith?" It was Montague Dewar who spoke.

"I fear we do," she answered; "I don't think good looks are the best gift a man can have."

"Woman, as a rule, carry them off far more wisely," was the rejoinder. "I have faith in Willie, that he will turn out superior to Donald, if he gets into good hands."

"That means out of ours. You think we err quite as grossly with him, as with Donald. I have strong twinges of conscience on the subject myself; he has improved vastly of late."

"Yes; do you know why?"

"No."

"Little Nellie Carnegie has taken him in hand, and she is one of the girls that it is a

rare privilege for boys to meet with in early life. She is absolutely truthful, and has not a grain of vanity or self-consciousness in her disposition. She is like a mountain stream, refreshing and rejoicing all she comes in contact with, and leaving all impurities and dross behind her."

"I must take a little more heed to her," replied Edith ; "to tell truth, I never have thought of her, except as the very plain, childish looking little thing, who read Shakespeare so well at the Caryl-Jones."

CHAPTER X.

“ I'll no' say men are villains a' ;
The real harden'd wicked,
Wha hae nae check but human law,
Are to a few restricked—”

IF a young fellow could only persuade himself of the fact, there is no part of his life so happy as the four years between boyhood and youth. He wakes up at nineteen to find life must be begun in reality. Hitherto no cares have oppressed his days, no anxieties given him restless nights. No other human beings are dependent upon him ; the smallest courtesies to the women he belongs to are sufficient to secure their affectionate admiration and self-denying help. He is probably strong in health, clear in mind, in the full beauty of adolescence, knows nothing of indigestion, has a certain sum allowed him to spend, and is sure that no trouble awaits him if he do not indulge in things that take him beyond it.

Such a picture one would imagine attractive enough in all conscience, yet how little does it represent the state of the majority of the young men of that age, one knows. Here, for instance, are our three friends Donald and Harry—poor Willie's youth, we know, was a sad one, but better days, let us hope, have dawned for him.

When Donald left the High School at sixteen, he had made some progress in the knowledge of Roman law. By Dr. Maitland's recommendation, when Uncle Aleck enrolled his name in the Edinburgh University, he placed him also in Mr. Red-Tape's office, so that he began a regular course of attendance at lectures, while acquiring a practical knowledge of other branches of his profession. In the lapse of these four years, Donald's progress in Civil Law, Scot's Law, conveyancing, etc., was respectable, if not profound. His mode of study was spasmodic, rather than steady-going.

When he found himself behind his companions, a few weeks' grind brought him on a level with those next to the foremost; but the impulse was not sufficient to carry him on a level with the highest, and maintain him in a position of superiority, if he happened to reach it. Golf and curling each claimed a portion of his time, and he excelled in both. His professors had each in turn great hopes of his future, which, although never exactly fulfilled, were not entirely relinquished.

All the necessary certificates were obtained, with one exception; this proved a wholesome check. He studied more diligently the next session, with commensurate success. He received no salary at Mr. Red-Tape's office, but Uncle Aleck was not illiberal in the matter of pocket-money. It all found its way out of Donald's pocket as fast as it came in, and Edith had often to be his banker still; but he was decidedly more conscientious


in the matter of repayment. A certain tenderness, also, in his manner to his mother and sister, made them indulgent to his occasional fits of self-will and pettishness. Popular with all the girls of his acquaintance, he showed no preference for one in particular. Increasingly handsome he became year by year, but had no small vanity; he really troubled himself about his good looks a great deal less than other people did for him. Open compliments made him contemptuous; those inferred, he took no notice of. Large in limb, open-hearted, generous to a fault, unsuspecting, Donald Ramsay, in his acknowledged position of social and personal superiority, had a right to enjoy the bright side of life, and, apparently, he used the privilege to the full.

Harry Carmichael had plenty of money; he aspired, therefore, at being rather a leader of the fast set in the Scotch capital. He hunted, smoked, drank, and gamed for

moderately high sums ; affecting the society of the least creditable of the young officers, who found time hanging heavily on their hands.

He was not, however, in the best of health, even at nineteen ; alcohol began its work betimes with him. His father drank for years, steadily, unceasingly ; his mother, from her marriage, thought nothing of a couple of glasses of sherry at luncheon, the same or more at dinner, with beer, and a stiff tumbler of whiskey and water with her husband at night.

Harry's complexion had already lost its freshness, and, at twenty, his hand was no longer perfectly steady, nor his temper uniform. It was whispered that fearful scenes went on in the grand house in Moray Place, which Mr. Carmichael bought after Lord Ramsay's death, and now lived in. Mr. Carmichael and his wife firmly believed that the comfortable feeling produced by their potations, was a sign of their healthiness,



and that it was almost a duty to promote this feeling in themselves and in others, and that the more people drank, the stronger they became.

Yet neither ceased to grow old, in spite of this strength-giving habit. Both became unwieldy, and but that Mr. Carmichael derived his constitution from a sober, hard-working race, who lived on porridge, and tasted alcohol only at long intervals, he would have been a martyr to gout, as his wife was to rheumatism. Neither knew that their habits, contracted long before Harry's birth, had their effect on him; that he was born with a weaker nervous organization, and would never have the strength they began life with; that the blood which supplied his brain as an infant, was poisoned and debased in quality; that their passions were exaggerated in him, while his moral powers of resistance never had been equal to those his father and mother had enjoyed.

Mr. Carmichael's generosity to his son was stretched to its utmost limit. A hunter, a driving hack, a mail phaeton, balls, concerts, theatres, billiards, his club, whist, with other less public indulgences, cost more than even Mr. Carmichael was at all times willing to pay, and the mortifying part of all was, that neither Harry nor his parents reached the inner circle of gentility in Edinburgh society. Mr. Carmichael could always find men, bachelors, poor officers, professional men, ready to eat his dinners, but Mrs. Carmichael's visiting list never progressed beyond her own old friends, people of scarcely second-rate standing.

Harry met some of the best sets at public balls, but even that was owing to his introduction by Donald and his military acquaintances. No girls of lofty parentage cared to be introduced to, or to dance with him.

"What a deuced advantage your family is to you!" he observed one evening to Donald

at a ball, when the latter had just led his cousin, a beautiful and graceful girl, back to Lady Carshalton's side.

Harry had been dying to be introduced to her all the season, but when Donald proposed it to Lucy Carshalton, he met with a flat refusal, and a request that he would waltz with her himself.

"I am very sorry to disoblige you, Donald," she said, during a pause in the dance, "but I cannot bear the idea of that young man's hands touching mine; it is quite bad enough to feel he is looking at me from a distance. I wonder how you can like him, or be much with him!"

"We are not so much together as we used to be," replied Donald; "his tastes and habits are too expensive for me to keep up with. But I can't turn my back on him entirely; he is an old school friend, and has been kind in many ways."

"He profits most by the friendship, there

is no doubt about that," said Lucy, "he is not his father's son if he does not get all he can out of every one he comes near. I heard a little about the old man's proceedings from my school-fellow, Marcia Farquarson. He bought up her father's estate, after leading him on to all sorts of extravagances; mind Master Harry doesn't do something equally shabby by you."

"At any rate, he can swindle me out of no estate, seeing I haven't one," replied Donald; "I am too poor a devil for him to hurt that way."

"Ah! but you have other things he can spoil, Donald; brains and manners, and—" she did not like to say good looks, but her eyes supplied the lack of words, "they are more to us girls than money, after all."

"To you, perhaps, Lucy, not to others; young ladies keep as sharp a look out for the plums of society now as their mothers used to do for them."

“I am glad my mother is not a fashionable woman of the world,” said Lucy, “she would never ask me to marry a horrid old duke for a title, or a vulgar Croesus for his fifty thousand a year, or any one I could not look up to, and feel he would lead me in the way I should go.”

“You will do that for your husband, Lucy,” answered Donald, looking down at the fair young face raised so trustfully to his, he did not read what it contained for him, his thoughts only turned homewards.

“Poor Edith is having an awful time with my mother just now, for preferring Montague Dewar, with his three hundred a year, to Sir Arthur McRae.”

“Edith knows what she is doing, look how happy she is, coming towards us with Mr. Dewar ; he is not handsome, but he looks a real man. Does Aunt Effie still refuse to sanction their engagement ?”

“Entirely ; but for Aunt Isabel, things would be intolerable for Edith.”

“Mother likes Mr. Dewar,” said Lucy, “she says he is the most straightforward, unartificial mannered man she ever saw.”

“It is curious that he says so little of his family,” said Donald.

“I shouldn’t care if he had risen from the ranks if I were in Edith’s place,” answered Lucy. “A man like him would pass muster anywhere.”

“It’s not pleasant to think queer relatives may turn up at any time,” said Donald, “which they would be sure to do. Dewar is not much of a name. I don’t believe he is a Scotchman, he does not say he is ; he doesn’t say anything, in fact. People all take him on trust, because he has such a confoundedly imposing simplicity and unpretentiousness about him. Still his father may be a convict for aught one knows.”

“Don’t imagine such horrors, Donald ; at

any rate, whatever his father was, he must have had a nice mother, his respect for all women is so great—”

This talk finished up the dance, then Lucy was whirled off by some one else, and Donald said, in answer to Harry's observation about good family, “An old name does serve a man a good turn now and then, yet some or rather most people get on very well without it if they are worth anything at all. I can't induce my cousin to dance with you, Harry; her card is full.”

“It was not too full to squeeze in a waltz with you, Donald; you are such a cursed good-looking fellow as well, you are a well-favoured lot. Your sister looks splendidly to-night; but who, in the name of wonder, is the ugly little girl your brother has got hold of? At any rate, she is waking him up.”

“Perhaps Willie is not the fool people take him to be,” said Donald irritably. Though sharp enough himself upon his less attractive

broader, in which allowed others to be so with impunity. Willie's position in a counting house was sufficient humiliation without permitting open contempt of him in other ways to go unnoticed. Willie had gone to the ball, a very unusual thing for him, because Nellie Carnegie was there, and he endured dancing for her sake.

"I am afraid I shall never enjoy the exercise," he said, after the second waltz had come to an ignominious end by his having caught his foot in a lady's train, and nearly thrown his partner down as well as himself: fortunately a desperate effort on both sides prevented the completion of the catastrophe.

"You had rather sit out, I know," said Nellie, laughing.

"It would be more creditable for both of us, I believe," he said ruefully. "I never shall dance or do anything well."

"What is the matter?" said Nellie.

"I wish I were rich and could spend all

my summers on the mountains, and all my winters in a library. When the long spring days come the columns of figures will fade into mist before the visions of our walks last summer, and the readings while you sketched."

"You must come again," replied Nellie, "we all missed you tremendously when you were gone."

"Is that true?" answered Willie, "no one is ever polite enough to say that at home, but then, you see, Donald is everything there. Don't you think him handsome, Nellie? I never heard you say so—"

"Yes, he is handsome, but I am a little afraid of such superior people, whom everybody worships. I like talking to you a great deal better."

The sensation of being liked was not so new to Willie now, but he had to have it repeated now and then to keep up his belief in its reality. Now his face literally beamed.

“ May I come to-morrow, at five, to take you and Mrs. Carnegie to the Academy ? We can look at Waller Paton’s pictures, and fancy ourselves back at Loch Lomond.”

“ Do,” answered Nellie, “ I will get Aunt McCorquedaille to come too, and she and mamma will sit down while we explore. I shall not be tired, we will have a real treat.”

“ How does your painting go on ? ”

“ Pretty well ; Mr. Hodson says my ’Eads are creditable, and my ’Ebe may go to the exhibition ; perhaps I may get a prize. How I did enjoy sketching while you read to me last year ! Mamma says she can understand poetry when you read it. I don’t read badly, but you beat me.”

“ Don’t make me vain, Nellie ; I’m not used to being praised, it will turn my weak brain.”

“ How about those verses you recited on the top of Ben Lomond, did you send them to a publisher as I told you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“Well?”

“He sent them back, the market was languid, the public glutted with poetry. He had thirty or more poems to return every week.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Nellie, “not such as you write, at any rate. Whom did you try? Magnus?”

“No, Middlemass.”

“Middlemass is a stupid noodle; do as I bid you, and try the big man.”

“Donald has had one accepted by him, a translation of an ode, by Theocritus, did you observe it in the last number?”

“Did your brother Donald write that? It was signed ‘Juvenis.’ I thought it beautiful, the grace and freedom of the old Greek life seemed living before me.”

“Donald *can* do everything well if he tries; all the leading papers noticed it favourably.”

“Some one else can do things well, too, and means to try,” she said, looking up at him

with her merry blue eyes. How pretty Willie thought her frank round face, with not a good feature in it, except her eyes; he was weak enough to tell her so.

“No, no, that won’t do,” replied Nellie, with her happy laugh, gentle, yet so ringing in its natural gladness. “I know very well I am a little fright, but I have the good sense not to distress myself about it—and what’s more, as I haven’t to see much of myself, except in mirrors now and then, I am not anxious to exchange my stumpy figure for Greek outlines, or my snub nose for an aquiline, or my red hair for brown. I am strong, and busy, and happy, and you must let me have this next dance with Charlie Cathcart, whom I see coming to ask for it; I shall dance off a little of my spare energy, and perhaps be a little more graceful afterwards. Charlie is coming out as strong as ‘Ercules, Mr. Hodson says, at the next Exhibition of the School of Art.”

Charlie Cathcart had only got out half of his polite invitation, "May I have—" when Nellie interrupted him ; " Oh, yes, I am so glad you are come ; I was afraid you would not find me in this large, crowded room."

As they are whirling round, Nellie entering as heartily into amusement as she did into everything else belonging to her healthy, thorough-going, active life, we must tell a little more about her and Willie. His three or four years of hard plodding in Leith, had confirmed him to a certain degree in business habits ; his employers valued his industry and regularity, but he had no commercial talent ; the bent of his mind was not towards sugar, and spice, figs, and raisins, and dried fruit. He had been sent on a trip to Spain, to negotiate about a new outlet for the business, but poor Willie signally failed. Only Mr. McCorquedaille's merry little niece profited in any way by his journey. Into her ears he poured out vivid impressions of the

voyage, and what he saw and heard on shore. To her, he went off into transports of delight, at the rare atmosphere, the glorious tints of the Sierras, the oriental colouring of life, still lingering among the people, and the magnificent flora of that sunny land. When Mr. McCorquedaille, in allusion to his failure, said—

“Poor Willie Ramsay will never rise above a clerk’s stool!”

Saucy Nellie Carnegie answered—

“I am not so sure of that, uncle; not to be a rich merchant like you, perhaps; but something—” she was going to say *better*, but her fine tact knew that would be a slight on her good-natured, kindly relative, so she said “different.”

“Very different, indeed, Nellikins; if I had taken no better idea of commerce in my brain pan, when I began life with sixpence, and a suit of clothes, than he has, I should not have been here noo.”

“ Ah ! but you don’t think money is everything after all, uncle ; who spends it more royally than you, where you see it will do good ? How many undertakings would have fallen through, but for this hand, that finds its way so often into this deep pocket ? Tell me ! ”

“ Weel, weel, lassie ; if I didna do my duty by the good things God has given me, I shouldna deserve to have them.” Mr. McCorquedaille always relapsed into a mild form of dialect, when moved, or pleased.

Nellie was right, money with him had been only means to an end, and that end the good of his fellow men. Duncan McCorquedaille’s name was to be found often enough on the subscription lists of great charitable institutions, but his charity did not stop there. Abhorring waste, he loved to help the struggling, and the needy, who deserved it. It was tender consideration, that led him to take Montague Dewar’s recommendation of Willie

Ramsay, and shut his eyes to his shortcomings, and supplement his salary from his own purse ; while he gave him full credit for what he did excel in, and in no way discouraged his friendship with his niece. His own wife and Mrs. Carnegie, were daughters of an old Scotch laird, whose pedigree had survived his inheritance, and had become the only thing left to him. The girls, handsome, and dashing, not over well educated, but trained by constant association with people of rank, married after their second season in Edinburgh ; one an officer who fell in the Indian Mutiny, from which his widow and child escaped by the skin of their teeth, the other less handsome, and portionless, contented herself, to the disgust of her proud and poor relations, with life, and ease, and plenty, as offered to her by an elderly merchant, reported to be rich, and known to be good—Mr. Duncan McCorquedaille. Mrs. Carnegie showed what she had gone through

in broken health and unstrung nerves. She and her sister had always been tenderly attached to each other, and no pride stood in the way of their affection now. Amiably received by her husband's relatives, who made up in kindness for what they lacked in gold, Mr. McCorquedaille's good management it was which, in addition to her pension, enabled Mrs. Carnegie to keep up a modest home in town, as well as a pretty cottage, very near Mr. McCorquedaille's mansion, on the shores of Loch Lomond; and it was in her brother-in-law's and sister's kindness, that her true happiness lay. Nevertheless, she used the advantages her husband's relatives could give, for Nellie; and kept up a warm friendship with them for her daughter's sake.

Mr. McCorquedaille had no ambition beyond his own position; if he associated with the great, and noble, it was on the platform of social benevolence, or patriotism; without

seeking for their respect and friendship, he undoubtedly possessed both. Mrs. McCorquedaille went through a good deal of cold shouldering, wet blanketing, and lukewarm watering, at first; but she could afford to be patient, amid all the good things her lot provided her with, till her aristocratic cousins decided whether they would acknowledge her or not, and in time nearly all came round, especially the very poor ones. They enjoyed a drive in her luxurious carriage, and tickets for concerts, and bazaars, and at last a visit in her country home, in the heart of luxury and beauty. The richer connections also became blind to the commercial pursuits of a man, whom Dukes and Viscounts and Lords did not disdain to honour.

This is how Willie Ramsay often met, and became attached to the little girl, who as Harry Carmichael said, was "waking him up."

CHAPTER XI.

“ Aye free, off han’ your story tell,
When wi’ a bosom crony ;
But still keep something to yoursel’,
Ye scarcely tell to ony ;
Conceal yoursel’, as weel’s ye can,
Frae critical dissection ;
But keek thro’ every other man,
Wi’ sharpen’d sly inspection.”

A NATURAL, but always distressing calamity, followed shortly on the ball recorded. Paralysis laid Mr. Tom Seton low, and repeated attacks carried him off in a few weeks. His wife had died in a similar way the previous year. Her father’s desolation had called forth Mrs. Ramsay’s better nature, and she regularly spent a part of every day with him. His death added to their yearly income ; but not so much as if heavy claims had not been draining it for the last four years. As was the case with all once gone beyond recall, Mr. Tom Seton was added to her husband on the roll of perfection in Mrs.

Ramsay's mind, and the living sunk under increasing reprobation. Donald's conversation with Lucy Carshalton will have explained matters as regarded Edith's engagement to Montague Dewar. Engagement it was, as far as a promise of mutual love, and faithfulness, could constitute a binding one, while he was absolutely forbidden by Mrs. Ramsay to set foot within the Priory. Lady Carshalton's encouragement of Edith's "disobedience, and unnatural conduct," as her mother called it, brought on a coolness between the sisters; which happily did not extend to the other members of the family.

"You persist in wishing to marry a beggar," was her frequent reproach to Edith, when any thing worried her; "and yet pretend to be unselfish. While we pinch and screw to make up for Donald's expensive habits, you refuse to marry a man who would be only too delighted to pour out riches at

your feet. What are your objections to Sir Arthur, pray ?”

“Oh ! mother, have I not told you often enough ?—they are too many, and too unsavoury, to repeat every day.”

“He is not old, you cannot call a man of fifty-five old ; he has a rent roll of forty thousand a year, an unblemished name of five hundred years’ standing, and the manners of a perfect man of the world !”

“I do not call a name unblemished which for four generations at least has been synonymous with everything that ought to be distasteful to a woman. My wonder is, how a Lady McRea has been found to enter upon such an inheritance of vice and misery. I confess I should not have the courage,” Edith spoke firmly, “even if I had the inclination.”

“And are you quite sure, your *preux chevalier*, your incarnation of all virtues, your *nonpareil*, has a perfectly unblemished

name? Has he yet condescended to enlighten you about the little mystery surrounding him, and which you are so magnanimous in absolving him from the necessity of explaining? Trust is very sweet, especially as in my Lady Carshalton's case, where it concerns other people's daughters; you will find yourself confronted after the marriage ceremony with a mad mother, or a disreputable father, if your misplaced confidence leads you on to take him before this little trifling *eclaircissement* occurs."


This was not the first time by a good many that such a hint had been bestowed upon Edith, and caused her lively discomfort. Nothing except his reserve on the subject of his family had made her doubt for a moment that her lover was a gentleman, both by birth and education; and even this reticence had not struck her until she knew her happiness was in his keeping, and no longer under her own control. But as soon as the feeling

between them had found utterance, and their engagement became matter of general congratulation, Edith bethought herself, how seldom he alluded to the past, and never to his immediate relations, or the home of childhood, that period which forms the brightest link between the present and the past with most of us. Of late Donald had begun to harp on the same unpleasant string; he resented Montague's quiet condemnation of many of his pet indulgences, although it was far more by example than by precept that his sister's lover annoyed him, for Montague Dewar neither smoked, drank, or played. Donald's cigars, in spite of the present from Harry of a box now and then, cost a good round sum yearly, and his tailor's bill amounted probably to twice the sum that Dewar's did; flowers occasionally from Menzies, the destination of which seemed vague, when Donald explained their appearance in the bill, new books, expensive prints

for his bedroom, cricket necessities, an occasional ride with the hounds in Harry's company, and, most costly amusement of all, a game of whist with that set, kept Donald's finances always at the ebb. But one thing redeemed all in Edith's eyes—he had never been intoxicated since the night of his accident. The scar remained a salutary reminder every time he looked at himself in the glass. Montague Dewar was undoubtedly making money at this time by his profession, yet he persevered in the same rigid economy; no one heard of his giving large sums in charity, and his rooms were in no way luxurious. He cut Donald's first attempt to borrow money of him in the bud, by saying—

“I have no one to look to for help, my profession must keep me and my future wife, I have no spare cash to lend.”

“I can't make out what the fellow does with his money, Edith; every body says he is as close as an oyster.”



“Who is every body?” Edith asked.

“Oh, Harry Carmichael and lots of fellows. I don’t believe you know any more than other people about him; do you?”

“I know he is a good man, and a gentleman, Donald—and that is all I ask or wish to hear. When you, or somebody out of your ‘every body,’ can bring a wrong action, well proved and authenticated, I may reconsider my resolution respecting him.”

“You are as obstinate as a mule, Edith; yet you never go into a passion, and show one a weak side.”

Donald took himself out of the room, like one with a grievance. Edith sat down with her head leaning on her hand. This was the second assault on her to-day; perhaps people were right, she ought at least to make an effort to obtain her lover’s confidence; she would begin that very evening, on their way to Carshalton House, where he had engaged to take her over to dinner, and leave her to

spend the ensuing day. She had no right to involve her family in a disadvantageous connection, and perhaps a questionable association, for her own personal gratification. Edith had been so much accustomed to think of the rest before herself, that she even forgot her lover's feelings for a time. It would be an untold trial, but it must be done.

Montague came as was agreed, at six ; the drive to Carshalton House would last an hour. Poor Edith ! "The first thirty minutes," she pleaded for herself, "may be left to the old unalloyed enjoyment of his society." Alas ! she was not aware how suspicion, however slightly indulged, tinctures manner, look, and even voice, with a restraint that is patent to an unconcerned spectator, how much more to the loving glance that watches every shadow on the face it adores. Their first greeting had been scarcely interchanged before Edith began to

feel how difficult it would be to talk on indifferent subjects. Montague, in whose hand her own still lay, looked anxiously at her; he could catch but a passing glimpse of her face as they passed the gas lamps in the streets, yet there was an inexpressible something in her tone, in the half averted face, that told him there was not the usual calm of her placid mental atmosphere.

“What is the matter, Edith?” It was a question so often put, in consequence of the various worries that surrounded her, that he asked it with a faint hope of one of her usual replies. “Is Donald all right?” he added, as she kept silence. Edith still did not speak, but he heard a smothered sob, and her hand trembled. “Edith, my own!” he exclaimed, and it was like a cry of tenderness, sorrow, and fear, all in one. He drew her to him in the dim light, and kissed eyes that were full of tears.

“Oh! Montague,” she murmured; “they

will not let us be happy ! Why cannot those who love and trust each other be allowed to do it ? ”

“ Has your mother made any *other* objection to me ? ”

The emphasis on the *other* was very plain. Edith had mentioned every objection as they had been raised, except his reticence about his family. He had been expecting that, and now felt it was come.

“ She wants you to tell— ”

“ What ? ”

“ More of your past history,” Edith said, with a vast effort.

She felt his arms relax, and he sat upright, and rigid ; she could see a strange expression on his face, as the light from the toll bar shone into the carriage. Not a sound, but the rumble of the wheels and the pattering of the rain, flung against the window by a north-west squall, disturbed the awful quiet of the next three or four minutes. They *seemed* a hundred to Edith.

“ My own darling ! ” she said at last, for he now trembled ;—the words told plainly it was not she who doubted him in any way ; that her heart beat as truly for him as ever ; still he did not speak.

“ Will it satisfy these—other—people, do you think, if I give you my assurance that my life has been as blameless as it is possible for a human conscience to keep it.” He spoke hoarsely, and with evident difficulty. Edith clung closely to him now. “ Thank you, Edith,” he said, humbly ; “ I have perhaps no right to accept your noble trust and self-sacrifice ; yet I call God to witness how patiently I have struggled against misfortune, brought upon me by others, not by any fault of mine. Must I lose you ? Edith, do you wish us to part ? ”

“ No, no, beloved ; no,” she said, passionately ; “ if I do not marry you, I will live and die unmarried, for I know Heaven meant us to be one.”

“Then you do not ask me to tell you more?”

“If you can confide in me, it would be better, Montague; if the fault, or the—whatever it be, is not your own, it would be wiser for me to be able to say I know all, and yet love you.”

“Have you no secret from me, Edith, nothing that you suffer daily, hourly, that I cannot share?”

Edith did not answer directly, at last she said—

“Yes, Montague, you are right—there are things one cannot tell—there would be no use in telling—that we can only hope the grave will kindly receive, and bury them away from our sight for ever.”

“Just that,” he said, slowly; “my secret is such an one. I dare not tell you, Edith, because knowing it, you could not perhaps face a cruel world, and say, ‘I will marry him in spite of all.’ Can you trust me,

darling, knowing I am innocent, and wait? Wait, till I can say I am free, and reveal all. With my career ensured, an honourable name obtained, a competency secured, I should not fear what an unpitying world might rake out of the past. Edith, shall it be so? Or shall we part? I will do what you wish; it might be best," he said, with a groan, as her silence was only broken by sobs. "I have suffered long; what if the bitterest drop is yet lurking in my cup? Ask your aunt's advice, dearest; she is good. I will abide by her decree; it is the wisest course, no doubt."

Edith sobbed bitterly, her heart seemed indeed bursting with grief, which she could not control; asking advice on such a subject, even of kind, unworldly Lady Carshalton, she knew could only result in her engagement being broken off; motherless, in so far as comfort and guidance were concerned, how could she persist in fulfilling a contract for life, with one, chained by bonds of such a

nature, that he dared not reveal them even to her? Why had she spoken at all? Why not have left matters as they were, and still trusted? Did she not trust him now? Yes, firmly as ever, more fully, perhaps, than before. Oh! for the dead father, whom she had never ceased to miss since the grave closed over him, and now wanted more than ever. What would his advice have been? To shut out the one sunny spot in her existence, the love of this man, in whose tenderness she lived, on whose wisdom she relied, without whom life were more like living death? Uncle Aleck was still loving and true to her, but his hasty temper made it impossible for him to see much of Mrs. Ramsay, and he was an avowed admirer of her lover. Her aunt, Lady Carshalton, seemed the best to turn to. Montague himself advised it, and said it was the wisest course; but in the depth of her heart, she felt it would be the death knell of her love, and of her young hope.

“ Have you decided, Edith ? ” he asked at last ; her hand had grown cold with the mental struggle going on within heart and brain.

“ Yes,” she answered faintly ; “ I will write to you to-morrow, after having told Aunt Isabel—‘ Oh ! for light and guidance ! ’ ”

Words of gentle and humble trust, and self-denial, they were, with which he essayed to soothe her, as she lay weeping passionately, perhaps for the last time, in his arms. Each fathomed the depth of their love as they had never done before ; at the moment when parting was so near, when they would be at the mercy of a human being, weak, and swayed by the world around, to a certain extent—although far above it in a general way.

Edith felt she was scarcely presentable, as they drove up to Carshalton House. Escaping as quickly as she could upstairs, she made some excuse to get rid of Lucy, and

then looked in the glass. She was too hopelessly miserable to care about her appearance, but the evening must pass without her sorrow being even suspected, if possible. With one yearning, silent appeal for help, to the only anchor of the hopeless and solitary, Edith proceeded to obliterate the traces of her weeping. With her smile sweet as ever, if more subdued, and her voice softer than usual, no one in that happy party suspected how great a storm lay yet unhushed within her. Montague Dewar's efforts at calmness were not half as successful. His talk, generally full of playful humour, which, with the absolute courtesy of his manners, made him a favourite with most, gave way this evening to an abstraction which became more and more painfully apparent, especially to Edith ; he had in fact a racking headache, and avowed it, when Uncle Aleck rallied him on being so silent. He was the first to welcome Edith among the guests.

“It is well we do not live in Germany, or Norway,” he said, “or I should be trying to cut out your lover; you look charming this evening, Edith.”

She only smiled in a sad constrained manner, for she felt Montague's eyes were upon her. He was in fact gazing as if distraught on the face and form he loved. In her white dress and pale blue trimmings, the pure outline of her well-shaped head, and full womanly figure, was seen to perfection; the rippling chestnut hair fell low on her forehead, and its sunny luxuriance was restrained, and maintained in exquisite confusion, if the term may be allowed, by the comb that knotted it together at the back. Her eyes, neither blue, nor brown, nor grey, but something between the three, looked larger for the nervous dilation of the pupils, and the dark line underneath them; the lids slightly swollen, gave a tenderer expression to them, while the pencilled line

of eyebrows, neither the proud arch, nor the clever diagonal sweep, stood out clear from the transparant forehead. She was a woman to love, and reverence, and Montague Dewar owned it sadly, as he claimed his right once at least again, to take her down to dinner. Little passed between them, but their silence was not noticed in the general talk.

“Has Donald been translating any more fresh odes, Edith?” asked Uncle Aleck, as he took his place beside her on the sofa in the drawing-room; “I don’t object to his trying his hand at that sort of thing now and then, so long as it does not interfere with his regular work; a little literary eminence is as well for an advocate, helps him to a reputation, and forwards him in his career; he could do extremely well, the professors tell me, if he only worked more steadily. Is he amiable at home?”

“He and Willie have little tiffs at times, but since this success with Magnus, he has

been very charming. Mamma is delighted, of course, and Miss Honey Vinegar quite attributes it to a conversation she had with him some years ago, on Greek authors."

"No doubt she attributes everything, by hook or by crook, to her influence. I told her the other day I was using some new chemical manure for my turnips, and she immediately said she once met the inventor, and made suggestions to him, which she seemed to infer led to the whole discovery. I have no doubt she will discover a planet before she dies ; she is now busy, she tells me, on a treatise about Bishop Berkeley and Comte."

"I believe you have a secret liking for Miss Honey, Uncle Aleck," said Lucy Carshalton, who had been standing by ; "you always know more about her than anybody else does. Take care she does not prove more than a match for you by making a match with you."

"God forbid !" replied Uncle Aleck

with a well imitated shudder. "The fact is, she tells me what she is doing, and has done, and is likely to do. I have a respect for clever women, if they only would not make it so evident they aspire to know everything. Because there are a good many noodles of the masculine persuasion who have not the average amount of book learning, the dozen learned hens there are in the world need not crow so violently as they do over the superiority of the female brain. A woman that really knows something cannot be really sat upon,—snuffed out entirely; Miss Honey is no fool."

"She was recommending me a course of reading last week," said Lucy. "I fancy she thinks mamma's way of bringing me up doesn't answer."

"And pray, what was the course, pussy?" put in her mother.

"I was to begin Latin at once, go through a certain number of books in Euclid, get up

the poetry of the age of Alfred the Great, thoroughly master the reasons why Charles the First fell out with his people, and what they had to say for themselves ; engage in some interesting pursuit, by way of amusement, such as chemistry, physiology, geology, or something akin, read Bacon's essays, and write my own ideas upon them, study harmony, and thorough bass ; and make myself mistress of English versification, besides practising four hours a day, and learning free-hand drawing at the School of Art, and reading a few of the best works of the period. It makes my head ache only to think of so many things," said Lucy, holding her temples tight with her slender fingers. " I asked her what time I should have for skating, riding, walking, visiting my old women, and practising the common amenities of life among my equals ? "

" What did she say ? " said Uncle Aleck, with a broad grin.

“That if I only got up early, I should have plenty of time for all.”

“Three in the summer, five o’clock in winter time, I presume,” put in Edith.

“Probably,” said Lucy, “but she contrives to find a couple of hours a day for devotional reading as well. Oh! Uncle Aleck, is it possible?”

“Scarcely, I should think, child, consistently with a sound brain, and healthy digestion. How does your mother manage? you can’t do better than follow in her steps.”

“Mamma does everything she ought, by some sort of supernatural talent. She does get up far earlier than I,” said Lucy thoughtfully; “she has always time to hear everybody’s complaints, and to give them good advice, which they don’t always take, more shame for them, and to attend to papa, who you all know, never leaves her in peace two minutes if he is in the house. It is ‘My dear come here,’ or ‘Do you remember this,

or that ?' or, ' Where is her ladyship ?' the moment he gets indoors, yet she seems to know something of all the topics of the day, and generally to take the side of common sense and good feeling."

" Well done ! Lucy," said Uncle Aleck, clapping his hands ; " just the woman that, to make a good wife, and good mother. Stick to the pattern, Lucy, take an old man's advice."

" And yet uncle, if one never married—girls don't marry sometimes you know—when—when the people they like, don't like them—perhaps, all these learned subjects might be a comfort !"

Uncle Aleck laughed outright, " Cold comfort, your face seems to imply, Lucy. Ah ! well, dearie," he said, passing his hands over her smooth plaits of hair, as she knelt beside him, " you must not take refuge in them for a few years at least. Now go and sing a Scotch song, none of your miserable ditties about

damp gardens, and standing on bridges by moonlight, or Break, Break, that suggest rheumatism, and cold chill.”

But Lucy was not in a gay humour, she sang a Scotch song, it was a sad one, “Farewell, thou stream,” and she rendered it with a pathos peculiar to Scotch women. When she reached the lines—

“Condemned to drag a hopeless chain,
And yet in secret languish ;
To feel a fire in every vein,
Nor dare disclose my anguish.

“Love’s veriest wretch, unseen, unknown,
I fain my grief would cover ;
The bursting sigh, the unweeting groan,
Betray the hapless lover.

“I know thou doom’st me to despair,
Nor will, nor canst relieve me ;
But, oh ! Eliza, hear one prayer—
For pity’s sake forgive me !”

Montague Dewar, who had stolen to Edith’s side, struggled in vain to hide the effect of the words upon him.

“I must go, Edith. Farewell ; do not fear,” he said, in a tone she alone could hear ;

“do as you propose to-night, or to-morrow. I can bear all for your sake.”

With a look no one saw but herself, and no one else but herself could have interpreted, he left the room quietly. With his presence, Edith felt as if the sunlight of her life had indeed departed, and the grey cold mists had settled round her, through which no ray of comfort could pierce. She must struggle on through them, over the stony path of life, into its boundless depths, up to its dangerous heights, no one near to guide, to whisper hope, to promise shelter. The cold, rough blast, the chilling rain, the blinding scud, and that path, whose end lay far in the dim distance !

CHAPTER XII.

“But, ooh! mankind are unco’ weak,
And little to be trusted;
If self the wavering balance shake,
It’s rarely right adjusted.”

EDITH knew it was Lady Carshalton’s habit to be in her boudoir, arranging household matters, attending to the poor, or writing letters for an hour or two after breakfast; when, therefore, at the close of a wretched night, she rang for a cup of tea, then dressed, and went to the room, she found her as she hoped—alone.

“May I come in, Aunt Isabel? I want very much to speak to you.”

“Certainly, dear; but how ill you look. Have you not slept?”

“No; I am a poor, a very poor creature, come to you for advice,” Edith answered, with a sad smile, as she knelt down beside her, and, taking both her hands, laid her face lovingly upon them.

“What is it, dearest?” said Lady Carshalton, very much concerned, for it was most unusual for Edith to show so much emotion as she now manifested. Her daily trials were those that called for daily patience, rather than spasmodic effort at endurance.

“You like Montague Dewar, Aunt Isabel; that makes it easier for me to speak to you than to any one else about him.”

“I do like him, Edith; he is a man after my own heart—good, clever and a thorough gentleman.”

“Yes, and he is more even than that,” said Edith; “he is strong and firm, and yet so warm-hearted and affectionate. Oh! Aunt Isabel, for what cause should a woman give up such a man?”

“For no cause,” said her aunt, with evident surprise, “except some great moral delinquency, which I cannot fancy such a character being betrayed into, or—some

great objection existing in his family ; has he ever told you anything about his former life, Edith ?”

“No, aunt ; mamma and Donald are so constantly worrying me about it at home, that, on our way here, last evening, I asked him plainly to tell me something about his parents and his childhood.”

“Well, dear, and—”

“He said he could not do it.”

Edith’s head dropped on Lady Carshalton’s lap, and a great sob burst from her.

“Is it possible !” exclaimed her aunt in dismay ; “my dear child, this is dreadful.”

“You think I ought to give him up ?” said Edith, struggling to be calm.

“I certainly feel it is a very awkward case. What did he say ?”

“That his own life had been blameless from his earliest years, as far as human conscience could enable him to preserve it so ; but that he had suffered from the wrong-

doing of others, he did not say of his parents; that only the grave could cover the sorrow; that he would make an unblemished name for himself, and force the world to acknowledge it, and he asked me whether I was willing to wait till then."

"And what did you promise? Poor child!" a world of sympathy spoke out of those two little words.

"I promised nothing, except to speak to you, to tell you all; he is willing to abide by your decision; to free me from my engagement, if you think it right he should."

"That looks honourable and upright; but, Edith, I do not feel competent to judge in such an extraordinary case. May I ask your uncle? Men know so much more of the world and its ways than we women do."

"I would rather you did not, aunt, it would be betraying Montague. Uncle might unwittingly speak of it, and then—I wouldn't for the world do him harm."

“Can you trust me to put it to my husband without naming any one? in such a way that he cannot by any possibility guess that my question concerns you? I dare not act on my own responsibility, Edith. I love you too well, and respect Montague Dewar too much.”

Edith considered a few moments.

“If you think you can do it without injuring him, Aunt Isabel, I will submit.”

“Trust me, dear Edith; we shall feel both safer and happier for a man’s opinion.”

Chance seemed to favour Lady Carshalton’s proposal. Edith had scarcely left the room before Lord Carshalton entered.

“Can you come to Craig Burn with me, this morning?” he asked; “I want your advice about cutting down some trees.”

Another morning Lady Carshalton might have looked regretfully at a heap of unanswered letters, but this was too good an opportunity of getting Edith’s question settled,

to be lost, and she put on her hat and cloak at once.

Not on the road thither, but when her husband's mind was thoroughly set at rest by ample discussion about the trees, and sundry other small matters, did Lady Carshalton skilfully lead the conversation round to the point she wished to start from.

"How glad I shall be when Lucy is safely and happily married," she said *apropos* of a discourse she had begun on the lottery of marriage.

"Will you?" replied her husband, with a touch of surprise in his tone; "I don't want to part from the child for years to come."

"Men never do like their daughters marrying," said Lady Carshalton; "I believe we have a great deal more trust in men than they have in themselves."

"Because we know our own faults too well, Isabel."

“How dreadful it must be for a girl to marry and find out that her husband was a rogue, his mother mad, his brother a convict, or his sister unsatisfactory ! ”

“Yet there are plenty of good women who would do it,” said Lord Carshalton.

“Yes, the very fact of their being good, would urge them to try and make up for such a trial to the man they love. What would you do if you were asked to give Lucy to a man unexceptionable in every way as far as himself was concerned, to all intents and purposes a gentleman in position and habits, yet who had some dreadful secret in his family history ; would you give her to him ? ”

“Certainly not, unless I knew every particular ; it might be a hereditary impediment ; scarcely either, if I did know all about it. If his mother had been a convict, for instance, I would never consent. One has only to picture the endless torture of concealment, of constant fear of discovery,

of dreaded mortification, and the uncertainty of such a life, to decide at once on keeping every woman from it one has any control over, or the slightest regard for."

"I suppose it would not do," said Lady Carshalton, abstractedly.

"Why do you ask? one would imagine you were arguing from a case in point. By-the-by, how very out-of-sorts Dewar seemed last night, and I thought Edith was not at her brightest. What makes your sister hold out so obstinately? I am sure it would be an excellent thing for Edith. There is but one opinion about him in Edinburgh—that he is a rising man, if not rich at present; and one who deserves all the luck that may come to him."

Poor Lady Carshalton! she was as far off, certainly, as ever. If she could only have stated the case open-heartedly to her husband—if only Edith herself were there, she surely would have been tempted to do it herself.

"It is very odd how alone in the world he seems to be; he might have no one belonging to him at all," she ventured to say at last.

"So much the better; there are lots of fellows left to guardians, with no particular family. They have to find one among their wife's relations; it is often the happiest marriage for a woman—she is not plagued with a mother-in-law."

"But Effie may be right, suppose something disagreeable should turn up afterwards? we should scarcely have done our duty as relations by Edith."

"Pooh! pooh; my dear; there's nothing wrong in a man like Montague Dewar. If there had been, something would have cropped up in five or six years, depend upon it. If he admitted there was something wrong, that would be a different thing; in that case, I should be the first to say, 'drop the connection altogether, for friends' sakes,

as well as your own ; there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and time heals broken hearts as well as broken legs.' ”

Lady Carshalton had received her answer ; the one she dreaded, not the one she wished for ; she had not her husband's faith in the readiness of hearts to heal, but she was decided what her advice to Edith must be. It was a harder task even than she had anticipated ; when the trial of parting with her lover really stood immediately before her, Edith's sense of justice rebelled.

“ What if my renunciation drives him to give up everything, aunt ? what if in thinking of those, who after all think little of me, or at least have a strange way of showing it. I don't mean you, dear Aunt Isabel, nor kind Uncle Aleck—” Edith stopped, there were after all, many, whose feelings it was only gratitude for her to consider ; who had all loved her, and treated her with uniform tenderness. “ I am afraid, Aunt Isabel, my

love for Montague blinds me to everything else. I am growing selfish, and foolish. I must look a little nearer into my own heart, and see about its motives."

The touching humility of the words, the sorrow for her lover, far stronger than that for herself, went to Lady Carshalton's heart.

"Edith," she said, in a voice broken by tears; "you are so good, that I feel after all, you need no better prompter than yourself; act as you think best, darling; and if sorrow comes, I can bear witness you did not run self-willed, and obstinately, into it."

The embrace which accompanied her aunt's words, gave Edith but chill comfort; her mind was made up. Before she went to bed, a letter was written, sealed, and sent. The next morning found it lying, with its sad import, on Montague Dewar's breakfast table. He left Edinburgh the same day, there was only one not very important case left, before the courts closed, and that a friend conducted

for him. He did not return until near the close of August, when the Ramsays were settled in Mrs. Carnegie's cottage on Loch Lomond. The McCorquedailles had gone to Switzerland, and Mrs. Carnegie and Nellie with them. Sick at heart, and weary, Edith was thankful to escape from town, where at every turn and corner, she met reminders of her former happiness.

A week had perhaps elapsed after the Ramsays were settled in Inverardoch Cottage, when Mr. McCorquedaile's house, Glenbruach, became tenanted also. He had placed it freely, at the disposal of one of the hard working ministers, in the poorest part of Edinburgh; where he might recover from the foul air of crowded alleys, and renew his strength for another winter's work.

"I think he might have given us the offer, and put them here," was Mrs. Ramsay's remark, when she heard of their arrival; "what can such people know of luxurious

rooms? It is downright cruelty to place them in such a position, when they have to return to squalid, and small quarters again."

"Apparently Mr. McCorquedaille doesn't think so," replied Donald, "such people, as you call them, may have quite as lively an appreciation of the beauties of nature, as the descendant of a hundred Setons."

"Don't talk nonsense, Donald; we could have made a much better use of the place. I would have had the Caryll-Joness, and Miss Honey Vinegar, and other people, together; the new lady medical students also; a *côterie* of literary people, such as your great grandfather used to delight in, would have been charming there."

"Indeed, I thank the narrow boundaries of Inverardoch Cottage for a happy deliverance," said Donald, "and your purse can very well dispense with such a strain upon it."

"You think nothing of the strain you are

upon it, sir," returned Mrs. Ramsay, angrily. "I think you might dispense with your best suit down here, and wear out a few of your old ones."

"I feel quite capable of managing my wardrobe, at my age, mother," replied Donald, coolly, "would it not be as well to keep such valuable advice until it is asked for?"

The words were rude and undutiful, if Edith had been in the room, the probability is, Donald would not have said them.

"I have a perfect right to give my sons advice, and I shall do it," replied Mrs. Ramsay; "Edith, like a sensible girl, yielded to my reasonings, and has given up her foolish engagement."

"She will not marry McRea, though, in spite of having thrown Montague Dewar over. I am not quite sure, either, she was wise in doing that; people have plenty to say against it."

“People are fools, and you are no better,” said Mrs. Ramsay, passionately; “you were one of the foremost in saying she ought not to have him, and now are in a great hurry to turn against her.”

“I am only sticking up for the right of private judgment in such matters,” said Donald; “don’t expect me to consult your pleasure when I marry.”

“Be sure of bread and cheese for yourself, before you talk of feeding others; there are some years to come before that may happen. I may be out of the way by that time.”

Mrs. Ramsay relapsed as usual, after a tussle with her youngest son, into tears and despondency.

“I really think you might be a little more considerate of mamma’s feelings,” was Edith’s remark, when she entered the room a few minutes later. She encountered Mrs. Ramsay on the stairs, sobbing violently, and could only make out that Donald had been

disagreeable ; “ you know what the result of these quarrels always is ; she keeps her room for two or three days, and sees no one but Nannie.”

“ I am quite as tender of my mother’s feelings, as she is of other people’s,” replied Donald ; “ she grudges a poor devil of a minister McCorquedaille’s house, because she would have liked it herself, to entertain her delightful literary monstrosities. I shouldn’t care if they were really people of note, but just Edinburgh celebrities.”

“ The world would be a good deal poorer, if our contingent to its roll of fame were wiped out, Donald ; do not forget you are a Scotchman.”

“ By-the-by, Edith,” Donald began, with a shade of embarrassment ; “ I should like Harry Carmichael to come here for a few days.”

“ I don’t see how he is to amuse himself,” said his sister.

“Oh ! there is plenty of boating ; he knows the Dungellies over at Tarbet. I should be glad to give him the compliment of an invitation, at any rate.”

“I don’t see why you need put yourself and us out on his account, Donald ; you are under no obligation to show him civility under difficulties ; at least you ought not to be.”

“There you are again,” said Donald, irritably ; “who said anything about obligation, or thought of it, except yourself ; but if a fellow who is good-natured in a way, offers to come, one can’t refuse to have him.”

“Why does he not go to a hotel ?”

“Any snob can do that,” replied Donald ; “he wants to stand well with these Dungellies. I suppose he thinks, it will sound better to be staying with Lord Ramsay’s widow and family.”

“Oh ! that’s his little game,” said Edith ; “and you mean to humour it. I should feel

rather above being made a tool of in that way, Donald."

"I am not made a tool of," replied Donald, almost savagely; "he will write me word when he wants to come, and I shall not say we won't have him; don't let mother fill up the spare room."

"Where is Willie to sleep when he comes home on Saturday?"

"Hang Will, he can go over to Glen-bruach, or I shall."

"That I should consider taking an unwarrantable liberty with Mr. McCorquedaille's friends," replied Edith.

"I know a little of them," said her brother; "he is an uncle of Maggie Græme's, the girl at the farm, where the people took me in so kindly, the night of my accident."

"Is he?" said Edith, interested; "what is his name? How did you know him?"

"Do you suppose I was such a brute as to forget all about them, Edith? I never walk

out that way without going to pay them a visit."

"That is like your better self, Donald ; I am afraid I concluded they were sufficiently paid by mamma's present. I remember Maggie. Does she still speak as broad Scotch as ever ? I suppose she has gone out to service by this time ; she had the making of a famous little lady's maid in her ; she was remarkably careful over my dress ; it all comes back to me now." Donald was silent ; "you have met the uncle there, what was his name, did you say ?"

"I didn't say it," said Donald, crossly ; "but it's Macnaughten, if you wish particularly to know ; he is one of the best known men in Edinburgh, where there is anything like hard work to be done."

Donald turned out of the room, and Edith thought no more about either their neighbours, or Maggie. The lovely lake, with its purple hills, stretched far away in the mellow

July noon, and she stood by the window, with folded arms, letting the sweet calm of Nature sink down into her heart. The steamer puffed over the calm water, taking up and dropping its freight of living beings; but none had any interest for her; she was thinking of one, roaming perhaps far away, alone, and weary with the disappointment of life, and she was the cause of it; she, who was weary and disappointed too; and had done the deed, knowing what must be the result to both of them. Was there some dark fate, she wondered, leading men and women to work their own unhappiness? else how was it so many failed to reach the goal of content? scarcely any seemed to have their wishes fulfilled in this world.

CHAPTER XIII.

"But soft! What light thro' yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun."

WILLIE came over every other Saturday, and sought in turn each nook and corner where he and Nellie Carnegie had wandered the year before. She wrote to him once or twice, at the Cottage. Donald quizzed unmercifully, and Willie bore it with a bad grace—no more came—at any rate to Inverardoch. Willie still wandered solitary about the lake, and became more silent and reserved than ever. Harry Carmichael arrived also, but he was all day long at the Dungellie's, and no one at the Cottage missed him. It always seemed a relief to Donald to get him fairly off; he rowed him there every morning, and sometimes fetched him in the evening. One day, after dinner, Edith strolled some way along the road that skirted the lake between their

cottage and Tarbet. The lake looked lovely in its beautiful evening robe of purple and gold ; the ferns lifted their fronds amid the rocks beside the burns, and the purple of the heather was deepening on the sides of Ben Lomond. A boat lay rocking in a little creek which received a brook that came tumbling down through a densely wooded glen, skirted now on one side then on the other by a scarcely distinguishable path. It was too tempting to pass ; the loneliness and silence, broken only by the fall of the streamlet over its stony bed, beguiled Edith to explore ; she had to fight her way, here and there, through brambles and brushwood, and bracken. She did it with the physical enjoyment that exercise always gives to healthy people, but her heart was as sorrowful as ever. She had not heard a word of Montague Dewar, and would only picture him a prey to grief, which she could measure by her own. Yet life must be lived by the sad as well as by the

joyous ; and hopeless as her fate seemed, Edith, from the first, made the resolution, which her calm, steady nature enabled her to persevere in, that no sufferings on her own account should react on those to whom she owed the duties of daughter and sister. She succeeded so well, that Donald, in his secret heart, decided she had never really cared for her lover, or was happily able to forget. He had never watched her in solitary moments like this, when having penetrated some way up the glen, she sat down wearied with intense yearning for the presence and the voice of him who would have enjoyed all this beauty, and doubled it, by drawing out lessons of wisdom, and thankful love, from every nook and turn. What a difference in her lot a few weeks had made!—now she was not even sure of his being alive. The mossy boulder where she had taken a seat was a little apart from the brook, and screened by a mass of foliage from the scanty path, above and

below; she could see any one passing in either direction. It was not long before her ear caught the sound of voices and feet coming down the glen. In spite of many a pause, they were drawing nearer. Silvery laughter rung through the dell, and then she heard a voice that resembled Donald's. In a few moments she doubted no longer, he was saying, in a clear tone, that had the ringing sound of gladness in it—

“Are you looking out for that situation as lady's maid, which poor dear Edith was proposing for you?”

Edith's heart almost stopped; this was no Miss Dungellie, as she had for the moment fancied it might be, brought so far on the road by Harry Carmichael and her brother, and making an expedition up the glen—there were only two voices.

“She didna', maybe, think the waur o' me for a' that,” said Maggie Græme; it could be no one else; she remembered saying how fitted she was to be one. “I may be glad

yet, to turn my hand to honest labour, when my father and mother are taken from me."

"Don't talk so, Maggie? You know no one but you will ever be my wife. I am only waiting until I can keep you, and have ensured myself in my future prospects, to call you by that name, which none other shall claim but you."

A voice of exceeding sweetness and melody, suddenly burst forth, and moving a twig, Edith caught sight of Maggie, as she stood, poised on a couple of dry stones, in the middle of the brook, facing Donald and herself, and singing with appropriate looks and gestures, to Neil Gow's lament—

"There's a youth in this city,
It were a great pity,
That he frae our lassies should wander awa';
For he's bonny and braw,
Weel favour'd with a',
And his hair has a natural buckle and a'.
His coat is the hue
Of his bonnet sae blue:
His feckit is white as the new-driven snaw;
His hose they are blue,
And his shoon like the sloe,
And his clear siller buckles they dazzle us a'!"

The arch drollery with which she declaimed the next verse,

“ For beauty and fortune,
The laddie 's been courtin' ;
Weel-featured, weel tochered, weel mounted, and braw
But chiefly the siller,
That gars him gang till her,
The penny's the jewel that beautifies a'—
There's Meg wi' the mailen,
That fain would ha' haen him,
And Susie, whose daddy was laird o' the ha' ;
There's lang tochered Nancy,
Maist fetters his fancy,
But the laddie's dear Sel' he lo'es dearest of a'.”

very nearly made Edith betray her hiding place by laughing aloud. Maggie was a very bewitching little actress : a straw hat, pushed back from a mass of fair hair that struggled down her back in long thick curls, a pink print gown, with white collar and cuffs, setting off her dark eyes and brilliant complexion to the best advantage—slight in figure, rapid in gesture, full of life and elasticity—a picture of beauty, such as it comes fresh from the hand of the Creator, without any adorning. Edith's very soul

sank within her at this new and terrible disclosure. Donald stood looking at her with the face and manner of one whose whole heart is in his eyes. Alas! Love between those two could only mean sorrow, at least for one; destruction, perhaps, to both; her mother would be mad with anger; Donald, wilful and determined; and who could tell how such a creature as that before her would use her power. A great light seemed to rise upon the past. The flowers at Menzie's had been bought for her; presents for Maggie might explain the way Donald's money went; yet she had no trinkets on, not even a brooch, a simple bow of ribbon, finished off the collar, round the tiny white throat. What a chin it was, with that pretty dimple! no rings on her fingers, as she crossed her hands over her bosom, when she had finished the song. Was she a mere pretty doll, a toy Donald was playing with for the time? But the eyes had soul and expression beyond that, as she said—

“ What would all the gay, proud ladies in Edinburgh say to Donald Ramsay’s marrying wee Maggie Græme ? It would make no difference that she was a wee bit bonny, too ; that goes for nothing with poor, lowly-born lassies.”

“ You are well-born enough, Maggie ; your father and his father were decent farmers, and your uncle is a respected minister, to whom the rich Mr. McCorquedaille lends his house for the summer. My own grandmother was no better born than you are.”

“ It is all very well, as you put it, Donald ; you haven’t the pride of birth most Scotch gentry possess. I believe you think the blood of peer and peasant is not so different as the peer would like to make it out it is ; and that our rough virtues are as worthy to be transmitted to a posterity as the qualities of the nobler born. I give you full credit for that, and am proud of it as my own work ; but for wee Maggie, you would have thought just like every body else in your station.”

“I do owe all that is best in me to you, Maggie.”

Donald's eyes rested lovingly on her face. Maggie's dropped beneath his gaze, and she returned to her former playful manner.

“That's no reason why you should insist on its being necessary to marry me. We can be friends, as we always have been, and when the grand young lady does step in between us, you will feel glad wee Maggie is heart-whole. It must be a drop of bitterness in many men's lives to remember their forsaken, broken-hearted, lovers.”

There was a deep pathos in the sudden drop of her voice. Donald as suddenly clasped her in his arms, set her on the path, and kissed her.

“That must last for a long while, Donald Ramsay,” Maggie said with some spirit. “I will not be kissed against my will by brute force.”

“I beg your pardon, Maggie; I won't do

it again, but you provoke me, and I don't know how else to punish you."

He helped her to leap over the brook after doing it himself, and Edith heard Maggie carolling in the dell for a time, then the plash of oars growing fainter and fainter, and then silence. When she reached the cove the boat was no longer there. Did Harry Carmichael walk to Tarbet in the morning as well as walk home at night? Here was a fresh puzzle. God forbid it should ever reach her mother's ears.

August was waning, a blaze of purple heather made every hill and valley glorious in the unclouded autumn weather ; guns had been popping in all directions since the tenth, and Harry Carmichael, who had returned to Edinburgh, was mooting a return to Inverardoch, tempted by the offer of some shooting from a friend in the neighbourhood, who, however, could not give him sleeping accommodation.

“You must tell him he cannot come for a fortnight,” said Edith, as Donald read aloud part of his letter containing the proposal. “Miss Honey Vinegar will be here to-morrow ; like your friend, she invites herself, and mamma will be furious if she is put off. I cannot have her worried, Donald,” Edith said, with unwonted determination, as Donald’s eyes kindled ominously. “You must begin to consider her as well as yourself, her health is not so good as it was.”

Donald softened at once.

“It is not. I was thinking so yesterday, Edith, why don’t you have a doctor ?”

“Because a doctor can do her no good, Donald.”

“Nannie must have a sad time of it, when she takes to her room after one of her tantrums.”

“Nannie is the greatest blessing in the world to her, and me, and all of us. You must not provoke your mother to ‘tantrums,’

as you call it, and please be well behaved to Miss Honey Vinegar ; do not tease mamma by making fun of her friends."

Edith spoke appealingly, Donald put his great arms round her and kissed her with unusual tenderness.

"Dear old sister ! you take care of everybody, while no one seems to think about you." He looked at her with an expression which the scene in the glen enabled Edith to interpret, it meant, "I am happy in my love, and yours is taken from you ; I am very sorry for you."

Donald was selfish and thoughtless, but not corrupt. Edith returned his embrace with affectionate warmth, and a swell of wordless prayer went up from her heart, that no harm might come to this, her favourite brother ; that God would weave the web aright, whose threads seemed a hopeless tangle to her just now, and shape his life to a noble manhood. What would a suffering woman be without this

tacit trust in an unseen, incomprehensible, power? To Edith it was like her daily food, yet many who think themselves of the "elect," might have said "she is in the world, and of it."

Miss Honey Vinegar came next day. Donald went down to the steamer to meet her ; saw about her luggage, and gave her a most gentlemanly welcome.

"How did you leave auld Reekie?" he asked, as they toiled up the steep ascent to the Cottage. "A prey to Americans in particular, and to tourists generally, Miss Honey? The regulation plaids up in all the drapers' windows?"

"Yes, our grand old city has assumed its summer aspect, to the great chagrin of an English friend, who has been staying there ; she says it is painful to see whole streets deserted, and all the beauty of Prince's Street Gardens lost, as far as the inhabitants are concerned. I reminded her that beauty was not *lacking* elsewhere in old Scotia."

“And that, probably, as the wicked Glasgow people say, plenty of families remain in the back rooms of the big houses, although the front windows are carefully brown papered, and a huge placard directs letters and parcels to be left elsewhere.”

Donald spoke with *malice prepense*, tradition said this little game had more than once been played by Miss Honey herself, who had sketched a charming “tour through Wales,” from the windows of her back drawing-room, when her finances had not allowed the annual outing for two or three seasons past.

“That is a libel worthy of Glasgow ; I wonder you have not better taste than to repeat it, Donald ; especially if that charming sonnet in Magnus may be attributed to ‘Juvenis.’”

“I must plead guilty to the bad taste, and the authorship, too, Miss Honey.”

“Don’t say ‘plead guilty,’ it was beautiful, my dear fellow ; I would give all I

"I have a great admiration for Uncle Aleck, Miss Honey," said Donald, unable to keep out of mischief with his tongue, at least, though his temper was all right at present.

"I remember him, the admired and flattered
 Donald glanced at the tall gaunt figure,
 from whose shabby garments and ungainly
 outline every trace of youthful grace had dis-
 appeared, and said to himself, probably,
 "Poor dear! you never had the chance of
 being in love, or of inspiring it, the state I
 was in when I penned that sonnet." Was he
 mistaken? Very likely, young people entirely
 forget the old were ever young.

"I saw your uncle, Mr. Aleck Seton, just
 as I was starting."

"I thought he was off to the Moors," said
 Donald.

"So did I. He says he may give you a
 look on his way up to Cairngorm Castle."

"You have a great admiration for Uncle
 Aleck, Miss Honey," said Donald, unable to
 keep out of mischief with his tongue, at least,
 though his temper was all right at present.

"I remember him, the admired and flattered

darling of society," she answered, "his tastes have changed sadly of late years; it is a shame such an intellect should have been allowed to stagnate among bullocks and turnips—"

"Useful things in their way, Miss Honey."

"To be sure, there's no doubt about that! But meaner men could see quite well to farming; his wife was my great friend, and schoolfellow, you know."

"Indeed!" said Donald, with that bland ignorance of family affairs common to rising generations, "that is why uncle so often talks about you, then."

"Does he?" asked Miss Honey, with the slightest tinge of virginal red mantling on her cheek bones.

"Here we are, and there is my mother, delighted to see you," said Donald, throwing open the gate. "She feels rather at a loss for intellectual society here, you will be 'a continual feast,' Miss Honey."

When greetings had been exchanged, Miss

Honey Vinegar went off into raptures over the rustic dwelling, the garden laid out between natural rockwork and the distant view of mountains, over the lake.

“Now come and take off your things,” said Mrs. Ramsay, genuinely delighted to be playing hostess again.

She led the way to Nellie Carnegie’s own room, which commanded the best view of the lake, set in a frame of Virginian creepers, whose leaves were even now rosy red.

“This is delicious!” exclaimed Miss Honey. “Dear, Mrs. Ramsay, how much improved Donald is ; such a distinguished looking young man. I congratulate you on having such a son, and so intelligent, so *spirituel* ; he might mate with a duchess !”

So thought the mother, and she was honest enough not to disclaim the assertion ; she merely said—

“I hope he will pass his next examination as well as he did the last. I have every reason

to be proud of one son, at least. Willie will never be more than a commercial drudge ; strange fancy that of Uncle Aleck Seton's ; something higher might have been found for him, even though he is next door to a fool."

Next day Uncle Aleck arrived. Curiously enough, Miss Honey happened to be on the landing stage.

"I shall go down to every arrival, if I am not walking," she took care to inform the family at breakfast. "There are so many Edinburgh people about now, and it is so pleasant to see them."

"Especially widowers, with a large house, and a fortune to match," thought Donald, but he had promised to be on his good behaviour, and kept the sentiment unsaid *in petto*.

After dinner, Uncle Aleck went out to smoke a cigar. Miss Honey found her work, and went also ; by accident they remained alone some time.

"Do you object to my cigar, Miss Honey ?"

“Not in the least, I rather like smoke out of doors.”

“That is a polite way of saying, ‘I abhor it in-doors,’ isn’t it? How unrefined foreign women must be! They spoil their men in the matter of smoking.”

“Englishmen are too noble to demand such sacrifice from their women,” said she.

“I think Emily would have gone on coming to my smoking room rather than leave me,” said the old man, with a scarcely perceptible sigh.

“Ah! a wife is different, she will do any thing,” said Miss Honey, with deep feeling in the inflection of her voice.

“Mine would, I am not so sure of others,” replied Uncle Aleck, “wives don’t seem to me to ‘give up much now-a-days; it is the men who have to give *place aux dames*! Such, at least, is the doctrine of your society; of the advanced guard of the Women’s Rights battalion, isn’t it, Miss Honey?”

“Men are not all so just as you, Mr. Seton; if they were, we women would make no stir for rights, or wrongs either, for there would not be any of the last-named.”

Uncle Aleck took off his hat in acknowledgment of the compliment.

“You do me too much honour, Miss Honey. I must be permitted to return the compliment by saying, if all women had your strong sense, and talent, they would have obtained all they needed long ago.”

Miss Honey bent her head still lower over her work.

“Has your farm given you satisfaction this year?” she resumed, after a pause.

“Great,” he answered, laconically.

“What an interest it must create for you, Mr. Seton; it seems a pity to have so large a house empty.”

“I enjoy it, Miss Honey, and generally have some one or other of my old cronies

staying with me—not many ladies—old Janet doesn't fancy them."

Mr. Seton gave her a side glance out of his handsome old eyes.

"Those old housekeepers are unmitigated tyrants;—you are come to the third stage already with Janet, Mr. Seton."

"Yes, but she is a good old soul; I would not part with her for the world—she was a treasure to my wife. I believe she reveres everything that belonged to her as much as I do. Ah! the race of such faithful creatures is dying out; I know only a few—Janet, Nannie here, and one or two besides."

"We discussed that subject in our society last June," said Miss Honey; "one of our members made some most sensible remarks, 'that every generation had its golden age, to which it regretfully looked back; the servants of each successive golden age were all treasures in their turn.' She believed Pharoah had a golden age, when all butlers

had been saints, his being a sadly degenerate butler compared with them. Some one later on thought Pharoah's age golden, and only wished his butler could be as easily put up as Pharoah's."

"Very neatly expressed," said Uncle Aleck, "it will give me an additional interest in that particular domestic, the next time the chapter is read."

"I quite think my friend is right, we do not know how well off we are."

"Yes, I do," said Uncle Aleck; "it is you who incline to the belief old servants are tyrants."

"Ah! well, I recall my opinion, out of especial regard for old Janet."

"And I must begin to break her in to other habits, Miss Honey, and have some ladies to stay with me. Will you make one of the party?"

"I will with pleasure," replied the lady, not seeing the wicked twinkle in Uncle

Aleck's eyes, or the sinister twitch in his lips.

"I must think about it. Here comes Edith, she shall organise a raid on Janet next Christmas. I must see if I cannot hunt up some literary celebrities, to hold high communion with you, Miss Honey, or my bucolic life will shock you."

"Indeed, you need take no trouble on that score, Mr. Seton; I assure you I can find pleasure every where and in every thing; it is the privilege of a well organised brain to take in all subjects, and find itself at home in every situation. I never know what it is to be unhappy."

She gathered her work together, and tripped with almost girlish activity into the house.

"I wonder whether your poor old house-keeper and your old widowed mother and sisters would have told the same tale?" muttered Uncle Aleck between his teeth;

“to my certain knowledge, you are a domestic blister, and make as much mischief as a dozen stupid women put together ;—my neck is more comfortable without a yoke.”

Uncle Aleck passed his forefingers above the edge of his collar, with a gesture of evident satisfaction. Early next morning, he took his departure by boat, in which Miss Honey could scarcely offer to accompany him ; but she plucked a rosebud for his button hole, and presented it with a beaming smile. He was undoubtedly a handsome old fellow, green and active for his years ;—perhaps it was hard to blame too severely the desolate old maid thus scheming to get a comfortable home for her advancing years. Perhaps Uncle Aleck thought so, for there was a relenting warmth in his “ Farewell,” and the firm grasp of his hand, as he took leave of her at the gate.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd,
Than that which withering on the virgin thorn,
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.”

MISS HONEY VINEGAR was an indefatigable walker and sketcher;—far more able for fatigue than Edith, who, in spite of the fresh air, grew pale and thin, and unlike her former self. Mrs. Ramsay could only go with her to the foot of some craggy height, and then leave her to pursue her walk alone. Donald was always studying when challenged by her to walk;—too busy to spare the time. Her visit was drawing to a close, he felt infinitely delighted at the prospect of relief; constant self-control was a new experience, and his patience was rapidly oozing out at his finger ends. He had hard work when Miss Honey was airing her women's rights theories to keep from using the same straightforward arguments, seasoned now and then

by a little strong language, which he would have felt justified in employing against a male adversary, and it was trying to leave her most telling points unanswered, because respect for her sex and position forbade what is usually considered rude contradiction. A symptom of insubordination cropped up at breakfast time, and was aggravated at luncheon, towards the end of the second week; displeasing Mrs. Ramsay, and ruffling Miss Honey, in spite of her protestations, that she wished to be argued with as if she were a man, "provided," she added, with emphasis, "my adversary never forgets his position as a gentleman."

Edith gave a sigh of relief, as she thought the morrow would see the guest safely on board the steamer, out of Donald's way, and beyond the possibility of making mischief.

With energy, quickened by her late encounter, Miss Honey started for her walk the last afternoon, and fate led her to the glen,

and to the identical seat where Edith discovered Donald's friendship with Maggie. They had gone up again this afternoon before her—it was their favourite resort—and were coming down. Miss Honey knew Donald's voice; he was saying—

“She is a caution to snakes, Maggie—a warning to men in general. I always think of Burns' ‘Carle of Kellyburn Braes’ every time I look at her. You don't know the piece, probably, and need not trouble yourself to look at it; it will never apply to you; you may study ‘On Cessnock Banks there lives a lass’ instead. I will repeat it for your edification on these stones, where you treated me to ‘There's a youth in this city.’”

Mounting to the place which Maggie then occupied, Donald gave the song, singularly appropriate to her, with consummate effect. How could it be otherwise, with his heart endorsing every word? Maggie clapped her

hands, and turned suddenly; the noise had frightened a bird from a bush near Miss Honey's hiding place, and she recognised her at once.

"Maggie Græme! my little model at the farm!" she exclaimed, scarcely able to help screaming in her surprise. "How came she here? And how in the name of wonder does Donald Ramsay happen to know her? Good Heavens! he is kneeling to her!"

"But it's not her air, her form, her face,
Though matching Beauty's fabled Queen,
But the mind that shines in every grace,
And chiefly in her sparkling een."

The words came distinctly to Miss Honey's ear, as Donald declaimed them with extra clearness.

"My goodness! With what an air the young 'hizzie' receives the homage of the handsomest lad in all Edinburgh!—and with what respect he treats her!—it looks much more serious than such affairs generally—no hugging and kissing; that will come later, no

doubt—this is only fine acting. Mrs. Ramsay, here is strong family broth brewing for you! Hush!” this to a robin, which was making a rustle among the twigs.

“Now then, as you have come to an end with your romancing about the Lass of Cessnock, tell me a little more about Miss Honey Vinegar,” said Maggie; “I rather like her.”

“How do you happen to know her?” asked Donald, in some surprise.

“Do you suppose no one but yourself ever finds the way to our farm?”

“So long as no other men go poking about it, I don’t care,” replied Donald; “I can’t very well be jealous of Miss Honey Vinegar. But what in the world takes her to your father’s place? Fresh eggs, cheap and good?”

“No,” said Maggie, hesitating.

“Tell me, darling.”

“Eh! just listen!” said Miss Honey;

“darling ! Well, she is a little beauty. He shows good taste, at any rate, in his flirtations.”

“She asked me to let her take my likeness,” said Maggie, blushing; “I did not wish it, but mother would have me sit; she came several times before it was finished; we thought her very clever and kind.”

“Sensible girl !” ejaculated Miss Honey. “Pity you are not a lady, Maggie Græme.”

“I will get the old girl to let me see the picture, Maggie. Has she it? I have never seen it at the farm.”

“Old girl !” grumbled the listening *artiste*. “Mind your adjectives, Master Donald Ramsay.”

“It was only taken lately, while you have been living here; she finished it a day or two before I came from home; father and mother want it; but she says it must go to the Exhibition in Edinburgh, first.”

“I’ll go and buy it straight off the walls,

Maggie, if it's good. I dare say, though, it's a horrid daub, isn't it?"

"Stupid ignoramus; as if I ever daubed! from such a model, too!"

"I think it is rather good," replied Maggie, "she put a posie in my right hand, and there's a pail poised on my head; she said she should call it 'Effie Deanes.'"

"Yours will be a brighter fate than your prototype, Maggie; no criminal for you, skulking from his fellows; but life with me. Mrs. Donald Ramsay shall be the envy of her sex, as well as its brightest ornament. It is really wonderful how your accent improves; no one would take you for a Scotch lassie, now, except when you talk brogue for fun."

"I'm no sae muckle dautet*, to hear ye say that, Donald man," replied she, "mither hae tarrow't† sair, forby I dinna keep to the auld gate; she says I'm unco' paughty."‡

* Flattered.

† Grieved.

‡ Stuck up.

“Whatever language comes out of your lips, is music to me, Maggie!”

“Bless me! The fellow’s far gone! Poor Mrs. Ramsay! Why he never really means to marry the girl?” Miss Honey inadvertently spoke the last two words aloud. The young people looked round.

“Was that a voice?” Maggie said.

“Fancy, most likely,” replied Donald; “or there may be other people in the glen. I must go back, Maggie, and be civil to the old cat once more; she will be going to-morrow, thank heaven! How I hate playing the hypocrite!

‘The thyme it is wither’d, the rue is in prime!’”

“Can he have meant me?” hissed Miss Honey, as if stung by a sudden thought; “I remind him of that horrid Kellyburn Braes! Dolt! Idiot! Wretch!” she shook her clenched fingers at Donald, as she half rose in her fury.

“I verily believe she is setting her cap at Uncle Aleck Seton; such fun! she went down to the steamer to meet him, and plucked him a rosebud when he went away. Old fool of a woman!”

“You are the fool!” said Miss Honey, between her teeth, as her lips grew an ashen grey, and her eyes gleamed like a roused tiger. “We shall see what we shall see! handsome noodle! And you, pretty miss, with your sparkling eyes, and your easy assurance; the time will come, when you will be old, and—

‘Be twisted right, and twisted left,
To balance fair in ilka quarter.’

When your gay lover may have made off with another sweetheart, and you be left to wring your hands, and dry your tears of penitence in shameful solitude. Wait awhile! Wait, both of you!” Miss Honey’s face was not pleasant to watch, under the influence of mortification and rage. A breeze fluttered

through the trees, as if Nature would fain carry the baleful influence away, on the wings of the harmless wind, where it might not hurt the lovers; a chill cloud crept over the glen, but the two happy mortals went on their way, unknowing, unthinking of evil; the robin carolled as they passed, the linnet warbled its contented song; no raven croaked a kindly warning. They would not have heeded it; the nineteenth century is above superstition—though alas! not beyond sorrow.

Miss Honey Vinegar hastened back to the Cottage, and reached it before Donald. All through the evening she was throwing out portentous hints, which everybody felt, but no one could interpret; least of all Donald, in his blind content. Another sonnet was shaping itself out of the happy workings of his brain, and he could manage to be civil again, for this last evening. Alas! it only added fuel to the flame, after the afternoon's

revelations. It was not, however, until Mrs. Ramsay was bidding her "good night," at her bedroom door, that Miss Honey whispered mysteriously—

"Come in, dear Mrs. Ramsay; I have something very important to tell you; it concerns yourself, deeply." Mrs. Ramsay stared, and for a moment dreaded lest Uncle Aleck might have something to do with the communication at hand; the bye-play between the two had not altogether escaped her notice, before Donald had playfully warned her to take good care her visitor did not become mistress of Craigstane, and executrix of Uncle Aleck's fortune, when left a widow; she remembered Miss Honey a young girl, and a friend of Mrs. Seton's, and "old men are never to be trusted," was her concluding thought.

"My dear Mrs. Ramsay," her guest began, when she had pressed her hostess into an easy chair; "I am dreadfully sorry to have

to tell you about this affair, but you are the most proper person to hear it."

"For mercy's sake! what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Ramsay; "don't be an age about it, if it really be important."

"I am afraid you will be very angry."

"I shall, but with you, my dear friend, if you don't be quick. I hate beating about the bush."

"It is not pleasant to be the bearer of unpleasant tidings, and especially to overhear things of oneself," mused Miss Honey aloud.

"What are you driving at?" said her hostess, somewhat sharply.

"Some one very dear to you is carrying on a most foolish love affair."

"If you look on it in that light," said Mrs. Ramsay, still dwelling mentally on Uncle Aleck and Miss Honey herself, "it is all right."

"How could I, or any one else, do otherwise? it is unsuitable in every way."

“It is not so much unsuitable, perhaps, as likely to result in discomfort in the end; people should be able to give up preconceived notions, and lay aside self-will, in a case where the characters on both sides are already formed.”

“It is all very well to talk about preconceived notions, dear Mrs. Ramsay, but there are certain rules, and actions of society, which cannot be transgressed, without arousing general discomfort and reprobation; inequality of station, for instance.”

“I cannot see how that applies here, Miss Honey Vinegar.”

“My dear Mrs. Ramsay, I should have thought you would have been the first to cry out about unequal marriages.”

“In age, yes; but we were speaking of station, just now; and I said, I cannot see how that applies in your case.”

“In my case! what are you thinking about?”

“ I thought you had something to tell me about yourself—perhaps—and—”

“ I was talking about your son, Mrs. Ramsay ; you would not approve of his marrying beneath him ? ”

“ My dear Miss Honey, are you dreaming ? whoever thought of my son doing anything so ridiculous ? but perhaps you are thinking of Willie. I had got the idea into my head you were talking of yourself and Mr. Alexander Seton.”

“ Nothing of the kind,” said Miss Honey ; not ill pleased to hear her name coupled with Uncle Aleck’s by Mrs. Ramsay herself ; another confirmation of her secret hopes ; “ it is of your son Donald, I am both thinking and speaking.”

“ Of Donald ! marrying beneath him ? you must be gone crazy ! ” said Mrs. Ramsay, more and more mystified ; “ pray explain yourself a little more clearly, or I shall begin to doubt your sanity altogether.”

“I almost doubted it myself, I can tell you, as well as the dependableness of my own eyes and ears,” said Miss Honey; “but it is true enough, no doubt, about that; and a much more serious affair than such entanglements are generally; he seems determined on marrying her, and as soon as possible.”

“Who? and to marry whom?” said Mrs. Ramsay, leaning forward; “take care how you malign the character of my youngest son, Miss Honey. I have a sincere friendship for you, but any enmity against him would destroy it for ever.”

“My dear Mrs. Ramsay, it is the wish to save Donald from his own folly, that makes me speak. I saw him this afternoon, walking with Maggie Græme, and heard him repeatedly offer her marriage.”

“And who is Maggie Græme? This is a most extraordinary mare’s nest you have found, Miss Honey.”

“You don’t know anything about her, of course. She is a very pretty girl, a small farmer’s daughter, living about four miles out of Edinburgh, under the Pentlands, Burn Loupit, I think they call the old place.”

“You don’t mean the house where he was nursed after his accident, four or five years ago? that little ill-behaved child, who wouldn’t answer when I spoke to her?”

“I don’t know about that,” replied Miss Honey; “I am acquainted with her, as a charmingly picturesque girl, who has sat to me for her portrait. She must be staying somewhere near here; they evidently meet very often. Are you sure he studies, as much as he implies he does?”

“I cannot comprehend the affair at all,” said Mrs. Ramsay, not yet roused to anxiety; “I think you must be mistaken. I will ask for an explanation, however, to-morrow morning at breakfast. Donald is so open-hearted, I can trust to his not telling me a lie; you

will not object to my taxing him with the affair in your presence?"

"Not at all. Tell him, to begin with, that I was a witness to his performance of the 'Lass of Cessnock,' with Maggie Græme, in the glen, between this and Tarbet; that will freshen his memory, and spare him the trouble of trying to prevaricate. Just mention Kellyburn Braes also, and you will see the effect it will have upon him. Indeed, I am very much concerned for you, my dear Mrs. Ramsay."

"Spare your concern till we are sure there is some foundation for it, my dear. If you had told me this of Willie, it would have given me no surprise, for he is never at home, and grows odder than ever; but Donald! I really cannot believe he could be so foolish, unless I heard it from his own lips."

"Well, charge him with it at breakfast. I am not like a stranger; if there should be a scene, I can hold my tongue about it."

“ I do not expect a scene, or anything like one,” said her hostess, in a tone of annoyance. “ You unmarried people are so apt to make mountains of mole-hills.”

“ Good gracious ! do you call it making much of nothing at all, when I heard him declare she should be his wife, in the face of all Edinburgh, in spite of social distinctions between them—complimenting her on her improved pronunciation, calling her Mrs. Donald Ramsay—she indulging in all sorts of airs and graces. She is no fool, I can assure you ; she is quite clever enough to get her way. They may be married already for aught you and I know. Don’t try to make me believe I am deaf and blind too,” concluded Miss Honey angrily, and in a much higher key.

“ At any rate, you are not dumb,” said her hostess, rising. “ Donald shall hear of this philandering ; it must be put a stop to as soon as possible. Where can the idle huzzy be ?”

“Most likely in one of the small farms near. Those people are all related, and play into each other’s hands. They are always rejoiced to get one of their class married into ours.”

“Whether true or not, I am obliged by your telling me,” said Mrs. Ramsay. “We will have it cleared up at breakfast.”

“I am amused at your thinking I was speaking of myself, dear Mrs. Ramsay; I assure you, anything so ridiculous as marrying, at my age, never enters my head. I am too great an advocate for women not thinking marriage the aim and end of life and all things, and hope I am a living example of my creed. The intellectual have ample food for thought.”

“I am glad you think so, my dear friend, for superior as you undoubtedly are, I do not think you exactly fitted to begin such a totally new phase of existence now. Good night.”

“Good night, dear Mrs. Ramsay.”

“Not fitted, indeed,” said Miss Honey, as she closed the door, and the mellifluous smile vanished; “that’s the way all married women have of putting single women down, just as if it were not entirely our own doing. We have not made such fools of ourselves as they have, and brought heaps of trouble on our heads.”

CHAPTER XV.

" I know not whether God will have it so,
For some displeasing service I have done,
That, in His secret doom, out of my blood,
He'll breed revengement, and a scourge for me."

It is a curious fact that, when a crisis is hanging over a house—a cloud enveloping it, pregnant with circumstance, ready to burst and discharge itself in discomfort, mental and physical, upon every member of the household—instead of a warning depression making itself felt, a spirit of light-hearted gaiety and tranquil happiness pervades the social circle, as if to make the contrast of the brightness more striking, from the darkness and misery which is to follow.

Mrs. Ramsay, indeed, came down with an ominous gloom upon her brow ; but as that was not an unusual event, no one heeded it. Strongly as she repudiated belief in Miss Honey Vinegar's story overnight, none the

less did it keep her awake, and harass her after a short, troubled sleep, when morning dawned.

She started up, with that sinking of heart known to those who have a disagreeable task before them, or the memory of past grief pressing on the brain.

As for Donald, he was radiant. He and Maggie had already taken an early walk through the heather, sparkling with gems of dewy moisture. The two houses were so near, that he could hear her carol in the shrubberies from his bedroom window. What more natural than that it should rouse him from his bed to follow her footsteps, before the sun grew hot, and shortened the cool shadows of the mountains. Accustomed to early rising, the exertion before breakfast brought no fatigue to Maggie; but heightened her colour, brightened her eyes, cheered her naturally buoyant spirits, and deepened the witchery of her voice and manner. Donald

rejoiced, also, in the thought of getting rid of Miss Honey—no sense of gladness at giving pleasure to a desolate old maid entered his head.

Edith, too, looked forward to her going with a sense of relief. She lived the last fortnight in constant dread of an outbreak with Donald.

Scotch people have sharp tongues, and use them freely when displeased. It is more honest, perhaps, and leaves less bad blood after an encounter than English self-restraint, but it is rough work at the moment of the fray.

Miss Honey, I am sorry to say, in spite of her long morning devotions, in which the forgiveness of injuries played, on this especial morning, an important part, looked forward with eager satisfaction to the thought of revenge on Donald and Maggie. She salved her conscience by telling herself repeatedly she was acting for their good, and putting an

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end to an intimacy which, looked at anyhow, must end in trouble to both them and others. Yet the scene as she entered the dining-room, where the low window, open from the ground, looked on to the peaceful lake, framed in wood and mountain, glorious in the freshness and brightness of early sunshine, made her regret for a moment she had said anything about the matter to Mrs. Ramsay. Her old friendship would, perhaps, have been better rewarded by her reasoning quietly with Donald himself, and putting up with his sauciness, if he took her remonstrances amiss.

Her first glance at Mrs. Ramsay's face assured her the leaven of information had worked. A storm was imminent—nevertheless, breakfast passed more pleasantly than usual.


Some words or acts of unconscious irritation the mother always indulged in, but this morning it was shown by silence rather than, by aggressive sharpness.

“How such a scene as that re-acts on one’s physical well-being,” said Donald, going to the window, with the open paper in his hand, out of which he had been reading scraps of the day’s news. “I pity the poor wretches, chained by the relentless toil of money-making, to dirty streets and dull rows of houses—on such a morning, too. Look at that gleam on the shoulder of Ben Lomond, now, Miss Honey. It is like some new expression on a face one thought known entirely already—some new conjunction of thought and feeling, revealing a fresh beauty.”

“Have you been making any such discovery lately?” observed Mrs. Ramsay, grasping the table with both hands, to steady her nerves and voice.

“One is always going through the process where beauty lies in one’s way,” replied Donald, unsuspectingly.

“Does it abound here?—I mean in faces,” said his mother.



“Pretty girls are not very abundant,” replied he; “the beautiful peasant is rather uncommon, I think. Tourists see them as through the glamour of ministering angels, ready, when they are hot and tired, to give food and refreshment. I have never seen any without vulgar red cheeks and thick ankles.”

“Such drawbacks do not extend upwards, to the next remove in the social scale?”

“I don’t think any grade is exempt from them entirely,” replied Donald, “especially nowadays, when so many ladies indulge in sherry in their bedrooms, and drams of *eau de cologne* on sugar, and drops of chlorodine, and other elegant supports—they add red noses to the cheeks and ankles.”

Miss Honey looked hard at her plate. The member alluded to was not pale with her, but we must do her the justice to state that her potations were almost *nil*, and she was think-

ing of joining the Temperance League—it would be but a slight sacrifice on her part, and seemed a sister virtue to homœopathy—temperance in drugs.

“I see you will take no hint, Donald,” said Mrs. Ramsay, her wrath rising with what she thought was meant to be a disparaging remark on her guest; “I must have resort to plain speaking, and ask how much truth there is in the report of your being seen with a girl in this neighbourhood?”

Edith looked up when Mrs. Ramsay began, and every atom of colour left her face before her speech ended.

Donald seemed confounded for a moment, then contemptuous, lastly rebellious.

“Who has been taking the trouble to pry into my affairs?” he asked scornfully.

“Never mind, whence my information comes, replied his mother, “is it true? Do you deny some foolish connection with a girl beneath you?”

“Certainly not,” Donald replied coolly, “Why should I? She is my promised wife, and I shall marry no other.”

“Then I presume this hidden lily of the valley, this rustic primrose, this wild briar without thorns, this nymph without red hands and nose, and with faultless ankles, is one whom you are sure of my welcoming with rapture, as a daughter—rather strange way of beginning an engagement with a girl of decent parentage, and unexceptional social standing ; one wonders what the mother of this beauty can be, to permit such rural wooing.”

“Her mother can trust her daughter in this case,” replied Donald, with sarcasm as biting as his mother’s ; “that is more than can be said of many of the nobly born damsels of the day ; apparently you have but little confidence in me.”

“I have heard such lively descriptions of her personal appearance and cleverness,” said

Mrs. Ramsay ; “that I should be obliged by your introducing her at once.”

“Nothing is easier, mother, put on your bonnet, and come with me to Glenbrueach ; I shall have great pleasure in presenting her to you all ; perhaps I had better go and fetch her ; it would be the shortest way.”

Mrs. Ramsay looked involuntarily at Miss Honey Vinegar for an explanation ; was she a servant at the minister’s ? The thought flashed through her like a lightning stroke ; that she was a visitor seemed unlikely. Miss Honey inadvertently betrayed a movement of surprise ; Donald comprehended the by-play in a moment.

“It is to you, then, my mother owes her information,” he said quietly, but with an expression of concentrated scorn that told on Miss Honey ; “I guessed something like mischief would be the result of having you here.”

“If young men will philander with young girls in public, they must not be surprised at

being seen and overheard, and that people talk about what they hear and see ; especially when their mother's visitors are the theme of their quotations and remarks," replied Miss Honey, with some spirit.

"Listeners never hear good of themselves," said Donald, looking at her savagely, yet with a twitch in the corners of his mouth, as he pictured her rage under the infliction of Burns' poetry ; " it is a very old proverb, Miss Honey Vinegar ; I always wonder why the devil they do listen."

Donald ! Remember you are in the presence of ladies, said his mother fiercely, " tell me who this girl is, and what she has to do with you ? "

" Would it not be better to put off the investigation to a more suitable time, mother ? " urged Edith.

" It is just as well now, Edith ; " said her brother ; " it must have come sooner or later."


“ Are you in league with Donald in this business ? ” said Mrs. Ramsay, turning suddenly on Edith, as if thankful to find some object for her wrath less formidable than Donald, in his cool assurance and determination.

“ Indeed, mamma, I hoped there was nothing in it ; that it was a mere boyish fancy, that would blow over, if no notice were taken of it.”

“ You knew it, Edith ? ” Donald said with an altered expression ; “ and like a wise woman, held your tongue. Thank you.”

“ I do not think it right, Donald, don’t suppose that for a moment ; it is most unkind towards Maggie.”

“ Because you think I am only trifling with her,” replied Donald ; “ you may as well know at once that I am in earnest ; I don’t give up my love for every idle rumour that may be spread about it, nor for any difference of social rank. Maggie Græme is a noble



girl, and a queen in my eyes." Donald spoke every word with emphatic distinctness. Edith winced, it was a cruel cut from him ; but she felt that she deserved it, and all the misery that might yet await her.

"Are you aware that by your foolish connivance in this matter, Edith, you may have done irreparable mischief ?" said Mrs. Ramsay sternly, and slowly.

"Less than you may do now by all this talking, mamma ; do not discuss the matter more now."

"I shall discuss any subject that concerns my family, when and where I choose," said her mother haughtily. "Donald, I insist on knowing who this girl is ?"

"She is the niece of the Reverend Jacob Macnaughten, a respected minister from Edinburgh, now occupying the house called Glenbruach, which his friend Mr. Duncan McCorquedaille has lent him," replied Donald ; "she is at present on a visit there, and as I

said, you can make her acquaintance in five minutes. How is it Miss Honey Vinegar has not informed you where she lives when at home? I suspect she has."


"Donald, you will drive me wild. Tell me, are you engaged to this vulgar little wretch?—a common farmer's daughter—!"

"And minister's niece," repeated Donald; "don't forget what is advantageous in the connection; you will have to make the best of it."

"I shall do no such thing," said Mrs. Ramsay, now at white heat; "you either give me your promise to have done with this dirty little huzzy, picked off a dunghill, and bred in a byre, or—you will rue it."

"Would it not be better to avoid a scene?" said Donald, his forehead flushing; "the discussion cannot be interesting to a stranger;" he glanced significantly at Miss Honey, as much as to say "what keeps you here?"

"I beg you will not go, Miss Honey," said



her hostess, as that lady prepared to follow Donald's hint; "this is more than a mere family matter, it is a struggle of class against class, a question of principle, of a mother's authority over a son, not yet of age. I demand, in the presence of my old friend and guest, that you promise to give up this disgraceful affair."

"I shall give no promise, for I see no disgrace, and acknowledge no wrong," replied Donald, doggedly. "Maggie Græme after a year's intercourse with her so-called 'superiors' will rank with any one of them; I rather doubt," he added, sarcastically, "whether I do not regret exposing her to the danger of being contaminated by their influence; at present she is in my eyes faultless; there is much in society I would rather she did not learn."

"Perhaps you imagine she has improved you. I am sorry to tell you your manners on this occasion point to a different result."

“Shall I tell you what I do owe her, mother ? that your son at this moment, is neither a drunkard, nor a libertine ; an idler I have been, and perhaps am now, but the surest cure for that will be the necessity of working to make her a home. She has been my best friend since the night I got this ;” he lifted up the mass of curly hair, and showed the scar on his forehead.

“ She has had an excellent eye to her own interest, and been clever enough to gull you,” said Mrs. Ramsay passionately. “ To be Mrs. Donald Ramsay, will be a pretty rich reward for keeping him in the paths of virtue ; it amounts to that after all. I am sorry my son has not sufficient moral courage to walk in his own strength. What if I persist in refusing my consent to this romantic ‘ mutual improvement society ?’ For a year, at any rate, until you are of age, I forbid you to have anything to say to her, either by word or writing ; be extravagant if you like ;

gaming, racing, even drinking, I call the habits of a gentleman, compared with the disgrace of marrying beneath you—!”

“Mother ! mother ! what are you saying ?” exclaimed Edith. “Oh ! Donald, do not listen.”

“I mean it,” said Mrs. Ramsay, pale with passion ; “all those things can be got over, a low marriage, never !” The mother’s fury was now beyond control, she struck the table with her clinched hand, till the breakfast service rang.

“Oh ! mother, if you should be taken at your word !” said Edith, covering her face with her hands ; but Mrs. Ramsay went on unheeding.

“I repeat, I will not have a vulgar huzzy for my daughter ; a girl little better than a servant ; a low, designing creature ; if you refuse to give me your promise, leave the house, Donald ; I will not live under the same roof, nor eat at the same table. I dis-


own you as my son ; you are not of my flesh and blood, and bone, if you do not give her up."

" Will you see her first, mother ? before we come to extreme measures," said Donald, calm, but very pale.

" No, I refuse to see her ; choose between her, or your mother, this instant. I am not one of your milk and water mothers, to be talked over ; choose, or quit the house."

It was a terrible sight, those too strong wills pitted against each other. Miss Honey Vinegar heartily wished herself away, or that, like Edith, she had held her tongue. " Blessed are the peace makers," seemed ringing random peals in her ears and brain ; she had " sown the wind," and was " reaping the whirlwind," with a vengeance. Approaching Donald, she put her hand imploringly on his arm, " Do not answer, for God's sake, till she is less angry."

" It is too late," he said, throwing her



hand off ; “ you should have thought before you spread your cursed tittle-tattle ;” approaching his mother with white face, and set lips, he said—

“ I have chosen a woman, who, if I ever have another home, will make it a heaven, and not a hell. We shall not meet again, yet, mother ; life is not worth living, except in peace and quietness ; neither one nor other can be found with you. Farewell.” He was speaking with deep, suppressed wrath ; “ Good-bye, Edith.”

“ Oh ! Donald !” she flung her arms round him. He loosed them gently, tenderly, kissed her repeatedly, while a mingled expression of love and sorrow softened the hard look on his face ; and then left the room. As his step sounded in the hall, then was heard crunching the gravel on the path, Edith sank on the sofa, and covered her face with her hands, in a passion of bitter tears. Miss Honey Vinegar stood like one amazed, as well

she might be, poor mischievous old idiot ! Both were roused by a fearful scream, that rang through the house. It came from Mrs. Ramsay, she had stretched forth her arms as if to recall the lost son, and then sunk on the floor, with that cry upon her lips.

END OF VOL. I.



